Title: A Supreme Fire of Thought and Spirit: Modernist Patterns of Cultural Renewal in First World War Britain

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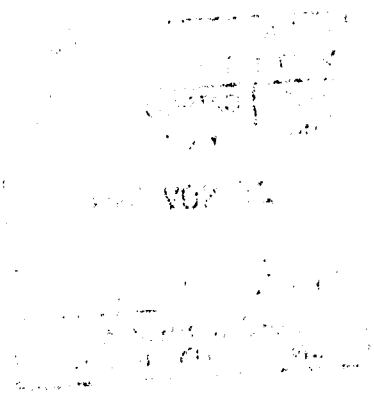

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyse a highly diverse range of intellectuals operating in Britain during the First World War through a "maximalist" model of modernism. This ideal type identifies modernist qualities in radical politics, religious faith, spirituality and philosophy, as well as aesthetic innovation. From this perspective, it demonstrates a gap in the exploration of the modernist dynamic of the British intelligentsia during the First World War in the current secondary literature. Further, it offers an ideal type of modernism that characterises the phenomenon as thought marked by a radical confrontation with an interpretation of modernity as decadence. The first three chapters of the study explore this phenomenon through a wide-ranging textual recovery of various wartime debates published in the avant-garde journal *The New Age*. The first chapter offers a survey of the philosophical and political modernism articulated by A. R. Orage, the editor of *The New Age*, which took the form of a fusion of Nietzsche with the neo-Marxist ideology guild socialism. The second chapter offers further textual recovery of other guild socialist ideologues who published in *The New Age*, including S. G. Hobson, G. D. H. Cole, Ivor Brown and A. J. Penty. The final chapter on *The New Age* completes this textual recovery and examines essays published by other contributors, including the promotion of Nietzsche by Oscar Levy and A. E. R., alongside the modernist thinking of figures such as Herbert Read, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Janko Lavrin, and Ramiro de Maeztu. Following this in depth survey of *The New Age*, the study examines the wartime writings of H. G. Wells, focusing on how the war led him to propose his own modernist religion as a solution to wartime modernity's alleged decadence. Having located modernist qualities in Wells' wartime non-fiction and fiction, chapter five explores the ideas of May Sinclair, who not only proposed a new variant of philosophical idealism that fused mysticism and new developments in psychoanalysis, but articulated this philosophy in her wartime novels, especially *The Tree of Heaven*. The final chapter examines three British war poets, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke, arguing that each developed their own idiosyncratic confrontation with a decadent modernity during the war. This analysis examines both their poetry and their wider attitudes and responses to the conflagration. The study concludes by arguing that modernist cultural production in Britain chimed with wider European patterns in wartime and postwar culture and ideology. Further, drawing on cultural anthropology, it stresses that significant aspects of European culture were thrown into a profound state of liminality by the First World War, resulting in myriad attempts by modernists either to revitalise modernity through radical ideologies and cultural production, or to forward ideas that used a profound sense of cultural decline and fragmentation to explore the deeper significances of living in a decadent modernity. Further, it suggests that the "maximalist" definition of modernism forwarded by the thesis could be used to explore other instances of modernist cultural production articulated during the first half of the twentieth century.

A Supreme Fire of Thought and Spirit: Modernist Patterns of Cultural Renewal in First World War Britain

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Introduction: 'A supreme fire of thought and spirit'

'War furnishes perhaps the most potent stimulus to human activity in all its aspects, good and bad, that has yet been discovered.' So concluded the Welsh Freudian psychiatrist Ernest Jones in June 1915, in an essay titled "War and Individual Psychology". 'It reveals all the latent potentialities of man', he continued, 'and carries humanity to the uttermost confines of the attainable, to the loftiest heights as well as the lowest depths. It brings man a little closer to the realities of existence, destroying shams and remoulding values ... It can make life as a whole greater, richer, fuller, stronger, and sometimes nobler.' His essay, published in the prestigious *Sociological Review*, argued that what we now call the First World War was allowing the peoples of Europe to reconnect with their primeval, animalistic urges. For many, he claimed, the war offered escape from a widespread neurosis pervading European society, a world where social conventions prevented people from sufficiently sublimating their primal desires in healthy pursuits, such as adventurous sports and especially sex. Only through combat could men find the sense of escape from their unhealthy states of repression, resulting in a temporary embrace of the animalistic desires of the unconscious in more or less their raw form. For Jones, it was an open question 'whether the psychological benefits that regularly recurring warfare brings to a nation are not greater than the total amount of harm done, terrific as this may be'. The war, then, was not merely destructive but also creative. Implied in Jones' article was the idea that the First World War was purging Europe of a state of neurosis, not only allowing many of its inhabitants a moment of profound psychic intensity, but also offering the hope that a new social reality could be established after a period of destruction, creating a new world in which a healthy mentality would be allowed to grow.[1]

War as destruction of a decadent order of existence, perhaps even clearing the way for a new society to emerge, was a theme common to many intellectual debates during the First World War. Even figures staunchly opposed to the conflagration itself could also find a positive aspect to the events. Bertrand Russell, for example, believed war represented a profound sense of rupture in European history, and that it pointed urgently to the need for a

[1] Ernest Jones, 'War and Individual Psychology', *The Sociological Review* vol.8/no.3, July 1916, pp.167–180.

new social and political reality to be built upon the remains of a decaying civilisation. In the final chapter of his *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, Russell adumbrated a vision for the future, a new era where life would be characterised by cooperation, not competition, and by a new sense of community, both within and between nations. The fundamental change that he believed was essential if a better world was to emerge after the war would not merely be of an economic nature, but would be characterised by a shift to an entirely new social philosophy, one capable of restoring a vital quality to the lives of Europeans. According to Russell, the 'world has need of a philosophy or a religion, which will promote life', and if 'life is to be fully human it must serve some end which seems, in some sense, outside human life, some end which is impersonal and above mankind, such as god or truth or beauty'. Nothing less than a new sense of the eternal was needed to guide mankind out of its present crisis, and so, for Russell, it was acutely necessary for Europeans:

> to create a new hope, to build up by our thought a better world than the one which is hurling itself into ruin. Because the times are bad, more is required of us than would be required in normal times. Only a supreme fire of thought and spirit can save future generations from the death that has befallen the generation which we knew and loved.[2]

This study is concerned with the wide range of views, drawn from multiple ideological and intellectual roots, that each manifested the following underlying interpretation of the First World War: that it signified the end of an age and that the war's creatively destructive powers could either lead to the emergence of a new and better time that would save European society from decadence, or would throw Europe into longer term, or even terminal, decline. For the purposes of this thesis, such assertions will be called 'maximal modernism'. In sum, what will be dubbed maximal modernism will be ways of understanding the modern world that diagnose elemental decline in the present and evoke the drama of a society either transforming itself into a new era, or manifesting inescapable crisis. Therefore, as an analytical category, modernism will be radically expanded beyond its usual limits of defining and describing aesthetic cultural production.

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[2] Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London, Unwin Books, 1971) pp.168–70.

Some preliminary working definitions

This thesis, then, seeks to explore instances of what Russell called a 'supreme fire of thought and spirit' by examining the writings of a series of radical figures operating within Britain during the First World War. Its central concern is to explore how and why many British intellectuals regarded the modern world of this period as somehow decadent, and developed cultural production that counterpointed such readings with radical visions for renewal – itself a key trope of maximal modernist cultural production. As with Jones and Russell, many artists and thinkers across Europe acknowledged that the war was indeed a deeply disturbing event, yet from its melting pot they also foresaw the emergence of a new order, a new reality, although the British dimension of this pattern has been largely ignored by the secondary literature on the intellectual history of the war. Therefore, this study is an attempt to establish examples of this Europe-wide view, which saw intellectuals present the war as a creatively destructive event, in a series of highly diverse British case studies: an examination of the evolution in the thinking of A. R. Orage, the editor of the radical *The New Age*; a detailed survey of contributions to this journal; an analysis of the fiction and non-fiction of H. G. Wells; an examination of the philosophy and fiction of May Sinclair; and exploration of a cross section of British war poets, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, and Rupert Brooke. This diversity of intellectuals and artists will allow us to explore the multi-dimensional comparative framework offered by the maximal modernism paradigm.

Despite the fact that many of these case studies can be seen as literary figures, or at least intellectuals close to the production of literary works, what follows will be specifically a piece of intellectual history. It will analyse literary works, yet will be equally interested in a diverse range of discourses that were developed within the British intelligentsia at this time, focusing on texts arguing that the war represented the end of one era and even signified the dawn of a new age. Therefore, works of political publicism, popular and academic philosophy, diaries, private letters, polemical books, and so on, will be regarded as historical documents of no less interest than novels and poetry. Further, the intellectuals chosen for this study have been selected because they offer particularly clear instances of the more general trend of interest to this thesis – a trend that figures such as Jones and Russell also exemplify. What follows, then, is not intended as a general survey of British wartime culture, but rather an exploration of a single trend that cut across many cultural fields during the war. The purpose of this broad representative sample of the British wartime intelligentsia is to

follow a methodological principle outlined by H. Stuart Hughes. To identify common phenomena within a diverse range of cultural production, he argues that historians of ideas can:

> experiment with drawing up rosters of personalities from specific periods for whom biographical evidence is sufficient and in whom they suspect the existence of an emotional common denominator; by subjecting these biographies to detailed comparative scrutiny they may arrive at valid generalisations about the deep seated fears and ideal strivings of the era or eras in question.[3]

The methodology of this study will proceed in this fashion, studying biographical detail alongside key works of cultural production, in order to present a snapshot of underlying emotive common denominators that characterised more general trends in the intellectual responses to the crisis presented by the war.

It is also worth noting at this preliminary stage that any study of 'culture' is a deeply problematic pursuit. The term itself can signify a range of phenomena, ranging from a minimalist idea of culture limited to the arts alongside philosophical and religious debate, to an inclusive definition that embraces populist fiction, cinema, vaudeville, mass media, and so on. Such broad definitions, then, not only include debates manifest within a wide variety of media, but also the unspoken assumptions of an organisation, a political allegiance, a particular class, or even an entire historical period. The word, then, can be used in numerous ways, and so we can talk fruitfully of 'political culture', 'populist culture', or more generally of a 'culture of racism' or a 'culture of class division', and even 'Victorian' or 'Edwardian' culture. One consistent factor is the notion that 'culture' can be usefully understood as a signifier not merely pointing to a 'thing' *per se* – though, of course, culture is manifest in a variety of media, in 'cultural products' – but ultimately to processes of communication, to dynamic nexuses of discourses interchanging ideas that gravitate around various focal points of particular importance to communities of people. Further, these nexuses of communication can be articulated in various registers of discourse, philosophical, religious, elite, populist, factual, fictional, etc., so by applying adjectives such as 'high', 'populist',

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[3] H. Stuart Hughes, *History as Art and as Science. Twin Vistas on the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975) p.62.

'political', 'artistic' 'modernist' and so on, one can make heuristic distinctions between different styles of culture.

To clarify some more terminology, for this study the term 'cultural production' will be used to signify the creation of discourses, while the use of the terms 'intellectual' and 'intelligentsia' will be used to signify figures who combined specialist areas of expertise, such as authors, philosophers, artists, critics, and so forth, and who used this expertise to inform the creation of discrete cultural products. Finally, 'Europe' will denote not only the main belligerent European countries, but also flags up a more general sense of common identity articulated by many British intellectuals during the war. As we will see, radical members of the British intelligentsia often regarded themselves as part of a wider international milieu, rather than perceiving their identity parochially as cultural figures operating solely within Britain, or more narrowly still England. As an examination of intellectuals, the remit of the study will gravitate more towards the minimalist definition of culture as manifest in the arts, philosophy and social thought, but in so doing it also hopes to suggest conclusions that are applicable more generally to cultural moods abroad in Britain during the First World War. We will return to defining key terms, especially 'modernism' and 'modernity', later in this Introduction, but first let us survey how key works in the secondary literature on the cultural production of the First World War have employed these terms.

The problematic nature of the term 'modernism' in the study of intellectuals during the First World War

When we turn to studies of cultural production during the First World War, we immediately find that a variety of historical studies highlight the fact that the outbreak of the war was actually welcomed, sometimes with great fervour, by many intellectuals across Europe. Such analyses, then, propose what is sometimes dubbed the 'modernist thesis' regarding the war's cultural significance, essentially claiming the war was defined by a modernising break with the immediate past. In broad brushstrokes, numerous general historical surveys highlight this pattern. For example, Eric Hobsbawm argues in his *The Age of Empire* that 'the peoples of Europe, for however brief a moment, went lightheartedly to slaughter and to be slaughtered'. They were 'surprised by the moment, but no longer the fact of war, to which Europe had been accustomed, like people who see a thunderstorm coming'. Continuing with this metaphor, Hobsbawm claims that the war was often perceived at the time as:

> [A] release and a relief, especially by the young of the middle classes ... Like a thunderstorm it broke the heavy closeness of expectation and cleared the air. It meant an end to the superficialities and frivolities of bourgeois society, the boring gradualism of nineteenth-century improvement, the tranquillity and peaceful order which was the liberal utopia for the twentieth century and which Nietzsche had prophetically denounced ... [I]t meant the opening of the curtain on a great and exciting historical drama in which the audience found itself to be the actors. It meant decision.[4]

Similarly, Michael Burleigh's recent exploration of the politicisation of religion and the emergence of secular political religions during the long nineteenth century, *Earthly Powers*, devotes a chapter to this topic, "Apocalypse 1914". Here too Burleigh highlights the importance of the trope of the re-emergence of senses of community among intellectuals, with the war reigniting seemingly dead mythologies characteristic of previous eras. Further, in his highly regarded *The Origins of the First World War*, James Joll also notes that, across national and class divisions, there was a common 'willingness to risk or accept war as a solution to a whole range of problems, political, social, international, to say nothing of war as apparently the only way of resisting a direct physical threat'. Further, for Joll, it was 'these attitudes that made war possible; and it is still in an investigation of the mentalities of the rulers of Europe and their subjects that the explanation of the causes of the war will ultimately lie'.[5] Although such analyses do not suggest that this mood directly caused the outbreak of the war, they offer crucial observations for any historical analysis of the cultural production of the war years, and help explain how the events could be framed in a positive light by many influential cultural voices across the continent. General histories, then, highlight that, for many within Europe, this optimistic 'mood of 1914' formed the social and intellectual backcloth to the drama of the war that was subsequently performed with terrible intensity.

To understand this phenomenon in more detail, we can turn to the specialist secondary literature on the topic. Here, we find a debate dominated by several key texts by Robert Wohl, Roland Stromberg, George Mosse, and Modris Eksteins. By analysing

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[4] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875 – 1914* (London: Abacus, 1994) p.326.
[5] James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* Second Edition (London: Longman, 1992) p.229.

intellectuals across western Europe before, during, and after the war, Wohl's *The Generation of 1914* argues that, certainly by 1914, many European intellectuals found they were 'living in disharmony with themselves, their time, and their most authentic urges'.[6] Indeed, even by the end of the nineteenth century, Wohl highlights that European cultural production 'began to split into two related but mutually antagonistic camps. On the one hand, there was the official bourgeois culture; on the other hand, there was the culture of the trailblazing vanguard.' As a consequence, 'Middle-class intellectuals born during the last two decades of the nineteenth century reacted fiercely against the first and gave their allegiances to the second'.[7] This sense of generational revolt was important because, according to Wohl, when the 'war did break out over Europe, it was interpreted by intellectuals as an hour of redemption, a rite of purification, and a chance, perhaps the last, to escape from a sinking and declining civilization'.[8] Intellectuals across Europe not only 'felt they had been liberated from their individuality and elevated to a higher state of being',[9] but also, for 'the intellectuals who identified themselves with the generation of 1914, the belief in an interregnum created an openness to radical political ideologies and scepticism about all nineteenth-century political movements, including social democracy'.[10] Wohl concludes by highlighting that the generalised sense of a crisis of modernity among the intellectuals underpinned the myriad upbeat reactions to the war:

> Upper- and middle class men born in the major European countries between 1880 and 1900 found themselves placed before a difficult set of tasks. They had to oversee the transition from an elitist to a mass and bureaucratic society, while at the same time resigning themselves to the relative shrinkage of the power both of their nation in particular and Europe in general. Upon reaching manhood, they were required to fight a war for hegemony in Europe, a war whose multifaceted consequences would overshadow and render infinitely more difficult any action they undertook. Witnesses of the breakup of the predominantly bourgeois world into which they had been

[6] Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980) p.235.
[7] Ibid. p.212.
[8] Ibid. p.217.
[9] Ibid. p.220.
[10] Ibid. p.230.

born, the most perceptive of them realized at an early age the necessity of developing new forms of collective life.[11]

A widespread sense of fragmentation in the social fabric and a search for renewed senses of community, then, were a highly significant factor in intellectual reactions embracing the war, according to Wohl.

Broadly echoing these findings, in Roland Stromberg's *Redemption by War* we find a similar explanation of why the war was interpreted by intellectuals across the political spectrum as a positive phenomenon. Stromberg's book highlights how many figures within Europe's intelligentsia read the unfolding events as an escape from a modernising, bureaucratised and increasingly 'rational' world, and initially found in the idea of combat a subjective sense of 're-enchantment', for life to be somehow injected with a new sense of vitality and community. Stromberg also repeatedly highlights the importance for cultural historians to recognise that many intellectuals of this period believed the modernising societies of early twentieth century Europe to be in a state of crisis. Consequently, he argues that 'relentless modernisms of the intellectual avant-garde grew in the swelling cities'; indeed, these 'modernisms' were the 'product of a technological order and the disintegration of traditional structures within society',[12] and he asserts that '"intellectuals" made their appearance as a group whose sensitivity involved them in an intolerable conflict with a "bourgeois" society'.[13] This dynamic was the result of 'Capitalism, urbanisation (into megalopolis and beyond, which Lewis Mumford called necropolis), deracination, atomisation, anomie, contract replacing status, cash nexus instead of human, an overly rational or mechanized set of norms, [and] *Gesellschaft* instead of *Gemeinschaft*. The crisis of finding an identity and sense of community in an urban milieu that offered myriad new possibilities caused considerable intellectual consternation, and within such societies, the idea of war took on new meanings. The 'old rationale for war', claims Stromberg, 'whether as a necessity, as duty, or as justice, had ceased to have much compelling power in the later nineteenth century'. In its place a new vision of war developed that 'placed more stress on

[11] Ibid. p.235.
[12] Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Kansas: Regents Press of Kansas, 1982) p.179.
[13] Ibid. p.185.

the motifs ... [of] renewal, adventure, apocalypse'.[14] Stromberg links these new imaginings of the nature of warfare to the need to discover senses of authentic community among European intellectuals. Therefore:

> A quest for identity and self-understanding marked the whole 1885-1914 Modernist movement in the arts. We ought to be able to understand the magnitude of the psychic crisis that confronted human nature when it was first released from primeval group solidarity to face the anomic megalopolitan wilderness, the terrible freedom of total permissiveness. Then in 1914, as young intellectuals repeatedly testified, the sense of community suddenly reappeared with the shock of war, and struck them with the force of a raw *reality* they could not resist. It is the most significant single motif. It was *felt* deeply, perhaps most strongly in Germany, but in fact everywhere.[15]

The result of this powerful call to arms appeared to be a solution to the senses of crises felt by intelligentsias across Europe's modernising societies. Consequently, the '1914 spirit' was not only 'an antidote to anomie, which had resulted from the sweep of powerful forces of the recent past – urban, capitalistic, and technological forces tearing up primeval bonds and forcing people into a crisis of social relationships', but also the 'primitive instinct to do battle against a common foe was a remedy for this crisis, unfortunately at too high a price'.[16]

Regarding the changing cultural meanings of warfare by the turn of the twentieth century, we can consult George Mosse's *Fallen Soldiers*. In this monograph, Mosse analyses the idea of war in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the lens of what he calls the 'Myth of War Experience' – a term he uses to identify and explore instances of a nebulous trend in cultural production valorising war, emerging largely as a result of nineteenth century constructions of nationalism. Mosse's book demonstrates how, throughout the nineteenth century, many negative representations of the soldier (e.g. as a mercenary figure) were displaced by idealised images emphasising comradeship, health, moral virtue, heroism and virility. Echoing the conclusions of Stromberg and Wohl, Mosse also outlines how this was a myth 'constructed upon a longing for camaraderie, for a sense

[14] Ibid. p.187.
[15] Ibid. p.189.
[16] Ibid. p.198.

of meaning to life, and for personal and national regeneration'.[17] By embracing combat as action and an opportunity to rediscover a sense of community, Mosse emphasises that people were able to 'confront and transcend death',[18] especially during the First World War, through such mythmaking. Further, 'the idealized common soldier [that] was an indispensable part of this myth, as well as an example of the new man who would redeem the nation',[19] came to signify myriad forms of liberation, escape and even salvation. For mythmakers, combat was the means by which the nation would transcend to new levels of 'health' and 'virility', ultimately as a result of the emergence of a breed of 'heroic' new men.

This trope of war as a means to Europe's redemption has also been examined in Modris Eksteins' *Rites of Spring*, a study offering further analysis of the cultural dynamics of the conflagration that again is acutely sensitive to the role of modernising impulses and the sense of rootlessness characteristic of the European intelligentsia before the war. Eksteins takes Igor Stravinsky's modernist ballet of 1912, *Le sacre du printemps*, as a conceptual metaphor for his study of the war's cultural production, arguing that numerous figures within the European intelligentsia saw the war as a mythic event whereby 'the new' could be ushered in ritualistically through a massive, apocalyptic experience. Indeed, many were even willing to give their own lives in order to be a part of this more general sense of renewal. For Eksteins, this spirit of revolt, framed within a distinctly primordial register, was endemic in the political and artistic discourses generated by the continent's discontented intellectuals before the war, and so a mood of modernism could also be seen in more general cultural patterns of the period. Consequently, during the war, across Europe soldiers and intellectuals were sensitive to liminal 'feelings of alienation, marginality, and, at the same time, novelty', alongside a belief that the:

> world was in the throws of destruction, which now seemed irreversible, but was also in the process of renewal, which seemed inevitable. In this latter process lay a reality of astounding implications: the soldier represented a creative force. As an agent of

[17] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p.22.
[18] Ibid. p.65.
[19] Ibid. p.65.

> both destruction and regeneration, of death and rebirth, the soldier inclined to see himself as a "frontier" personality, as a paladin of change and new life.[20]

Further, what is of great significance in Eksteins' analysis is his employment of the term 'modernism': 'The notion of *modernism*', he argues,

> has been used to subsume both avant-garde and the intellectual impulses behind the quest for liberation and the act of rebellion. Very few critics have ventured to extend these notions of the avant-garde and modernism to the social and political as well as artistic agents of revolt, and to the act of rebellion in general, in order to identify a broad wave of sentiment and endeavour.[21]

As we will see later in this Introduction, through the creation of the maximal modernist paradigm this study will embrace Eksteins' call for academic analysis to regard modernism as a phenomenon not restricted to the high arts. However, although Eksteins' analysis is very persuasive in many regards, his thesis does rely heavily on highlighting the modernist tendencies of German experiences by overstating the conservative nature of wartime Britain. Indeed, this relative conservatism in British cultural production is taken for granted by Eksteins, not regarded as worthy of closer scrutiny.[22] Further, the notion that modernist tendencies were a largely alien phenomenon within British cultural production is a view not only expressed by Eksteins. To an extent, this point is also implied by the limited range of British case studies explored by Stromberg and Wohl.

Contrasting the 'modernist thesis', Jay Winter has set himself in opposition to such a reading of the war's cultural production – especially in his book *Sites of Memory, Sites of*

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[20] Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (London: Papermac, 2000) p.211.
[21] Ibid. p.xvi. Similarly, Dan Stone has argued that, in order for intellectual history to more fully reflect the genuinely polysemic nature of the cultural debates of the early twentieth century, we must reject approaches that restrict an understanding of modernism to central protagonists. According to Stone, through the omission of the role of contingent figures in cultural historical analyses, too often modernism 'is still defined by two or three key players, while others, no less influential in driving forwards "its" reception (as if modernism was a unitary beast), are overlooked'. Rather, he argues that historical analyses need to offer a sense of the concurrent trends in the thinking of a period, conveying the variegated nature of debates and thought in a particular period. See Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) p.10.
[22] According to Eksteins, the idea that Britain displayed 'comparatively little interest in the manifestations of modern culture does not require extensive documentation'. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*. p.117.

Mourning. Here, Winter highlights how a number of trends came to the forefront in European cultural production during and immediately after the war – including an interest in themes of apocalypse and renewal; a turn to organised religion; a renewed embrace of romantic traditions; and a new interest in a nebulous form of spiritualism – and he focuses his analysis on how these trends allowed the war to be remembered by those immediately affected by the conflagration, especially regarding issues surrounding the processes of grieving for the masses of dead soldiers. However, Winter does not identify the sense of war fever among European intellectuals as an important aspect of the war's cultural production, and specifically wants his book to 'dissent from the "modernist" school' of interpreting the cultural history of the First World War.[23] Although he does not include Stromberg's work or Wohl's monograph in his bibliography, according to Winter, scholars who regard the war as an important event in the history of modernist cultural production often inaccurately present the entire body of cultural production created during the war as phenomena characterised only by modernist tendencies. Arguing that the debate among historians to date has often been divided between those who accentuate either the importance of 'modernist' or 'traditional' cultural production emerging from the conflagration, when we turn to Winter's own definitions of these terms we find 'traditional values' described rather hazily as 'classical, romantic, or religious images', whereas 'modernist' cultural production is characterised simply as a mood seeking to radically bend or break with tradition. What is problematic here, then, is that Winter's distinction between 'modernist' and 'traditional' modes of cultural production is actually rather vague. Because the heuristic value of employing such terminology is only briefly discussed, the reader has little idea of what Winter intends each term to signify, except that he has identified this distinction in order to 'go beyond the so-called modernist/traditionalist divide to a more sophisticated appreciation of how Europeans imagined the war and its terrible consequences'.[24]

In contrast, what makes Eksteins' usage of the term modernism so illuminating is his attempt to empathise with the modernist Zeitgeist, locating this temperament both within the arts and demonstrating that it was abroad more generally among radical sections of Europe's growing urban intelligentsia. In so doing, arguably he brings to his exegesis of

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[23] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.3.
[24] Ibid. p.5.

cultural products a more penetrating understanding of the cultural climate in which they were written, one often wanting to believe in the modernist mythology of a sudden break with the past. Eksteins, then, identifies a modernist temperament that regarded the war as a watershed moment in European history empirically in the sources; it was a part of the myth-making that many modernist influenced intellectuals sought to project onto the conflagration. Undoubtedly, this was not the only attitude that marked the war, although it was clearly an important one. Unfortunately, Eksteins too fails to offer more than a few sentences outlining exactly what he meant by this key term in his Introduction. However, before turning to a discussion regarding how this terminology will be employed by this study, firstly let us review some of the key texts in the secondary literature dedicated to analysing British cultural history during the war.

To begin with the now classic study, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, its author, Paul Fussell, argues that the war generated a new nomenclature characteristic of the modern age (including new significances for terms such as 'no man's land' and 'rank and file'), and promoted a new cultural idiom marked by tropes of irony, alongside a growing embrace of cowardice over traditional notions of heroism and 'playing the game'. He also claims that the war represented a fundamental break with the past, asserting that it 'was perhaps the last event to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful "history" involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future'.[25] Countering suggestions that the war years were characterised only by a demythologisation of terms such as 'honour', 'duty', 'sacrifice',[26] and so forth, Fussell also highlights that wartime cultural production created new mythologies, and claims that that in 'one sense the movement was towards myth, towards a revival of the cultic, the mystical, the sacrificial, the prophetic, the sacramental ... In short, towards fiction'.[27] The realm of the imagination, then, was actually

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[25] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.21. However, counterpointing Fussell's emphasis, Daniel Pick has highlighted the impotence of seeing the war as holding aspects of both continuity and change, and argues that we should not regard the conflagration simplistically as a watershed moment in cultural history. Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (London: Yale University Press, 1993).

[26] Bernard Bergonzi's study of British wartime cultural production is predicated upon this thesis, arguing that the cultural crisis of the war was predicated on the notion that 'the traditional mythology of heroism and the hero, the Hotspurian mode of self-assertion, had ceased to be viable; even though heroic *deeds* could be, and were, performed in abundance'. In its place emerged a far more sceptical literary attitude to war, epitomised by the character Captain Yossarian in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*. See: Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes Twilight: A Study in the Literature of the Great War* Third Edition (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1996), esp. ch.1 "Between Hotspur and Falstaff: Reflections on literature of war".

[27] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.131.

stimulated rather than destroyed by the war. Because of his nuanced analysis of many aspects of British wartime culture, Fussell's work will remain an important reference point in the secondary literature analysing First World War culture. However, its main problems lie in the fact that its focus is restricted to recreating trench experiences rather than probing more generally into the cultural dynamics of non-combatant aspects of the war's cultural production, for example by exploring journals such as *The New Age* or figures such as Wells and Sinclair. Therefore, although the work is based upon the idea that, for many, the war appeared to destroy one age and to create another, the notion of modernism *per se* is actually under-discussed, and the book does little to locate British cultural production during the war within wider European patterns of modernist tendencies.

Building on some of these faults, Samuel Hynes' *A War Imagined* offers both an authoritative survey of British wartime cultural production itself, and analyses the way cultural discourses after the war framed the conflagration as a rupture in Britain's cultural history. The book succeeds admirably in exploring the thesis that Hynes set himself. In sum, this is to survey how a sense of radical discontinuity between prewar and postwar worlds was 'imagined', especially by figures such as Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, W. H. Auden and Philip Larkin, through the construction of a hegemonic myth of a lost generation. This myth regarded Englishmen who fought in the trenches as figures initially filled with great enthusiasm, but who were killed in their droves by bungling generals, and, as a consequence, the survivors who returned were disillusioned with the values that defined the society that had sent them to war, resulting in a generation culturally and spiritually separated from the prewar sensibility of their parents. Although important to document, this facet of cultural production regarding the war is not the only perspective from which the landscape of British wartime intellectuals can be plotted. While Hynes' book often raises instances of the cultural patterns that presented war as a means to remedy an underlying state of cultural decadence,[28] we are given little sense of how a mood of modernism became manifest in various registers of cultural production, including politics and philosophy, as well as aesthetics. For example, his discussions of Sinclair fail to explore her philosophical or psychoanalytic writings, and therefore are unable to convey her vision of spiritual renewal through war. Further, we are

[28] For example, highlighting Edmund Gosse's 1914 pamphlet "War and Literature" that regarded the war was the 'Condy's Fluid' that would clean away the decadence of the Edwardian era, and saving the country from 'national decay'. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1990) pp.12–13.

given little detail of why Wells attempted to develop a new religion during the war, an idea he propagated through non-fiction publicism alongside wartime fictional works. Finally, we are not given any details regarding articles printed in the pages of one of the most important journals forwarding modernist debates during the war, *The New Age.* Indeed, regarding the latter, Hynes simply states that the journal 'became little more than a weekly review of the war'.[29] As the first three chapters of this study will demonstrate, not only is this a very simplistic, sweeping judgement but also it can be empirically falsified.

A far more narrow approach to understanding modernism is presented by Vincent Sherry in his *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, a book dedicated to exploring the output of just three modernist authors, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf. Sherry's thesis highlights ways in which these modernists regarded the hegemonic language of public discourse during the war, characterised by a rhetoric of rationalism that epitomised the strong liberal tradition in Britain, as the idiom of a decadent civilisation. Sherry's study, then, locates historically in the crisis of the war years the emergence of Pound, Eliot and Woolf's modernist aesthetic, drawing out how each artist sublimated sensitivity to liberal rational ideas as a sign of decadence into works such as "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", "The Waste Land", and *Mrs Dalloway.* As Sherry's analysis pointed out, attempts to turn senses of modernity as fragmentation into new, meaningful structures was central to the poetry of modernism. Therefore, the corruption of liberal ideals, alongside the artist's attempt to imbue the fissiparous reality thus created with a renovated, 'decentred' sense of logos, lay at the heart of poems such as "The Waste Land".[30] Although Sherry's analysis throws a great deal of scholarly light on modernism in literary aesthetics, unlike Eksteins and others he does little to demonstrate the presence of a wider mood of modernism permeating a range of fields of British cultural production during this period. For example, Wells' writings are presented one dimensionally as epitomising the liberal rational sense of decadence that literary modernism was reacting against. However, the tropes that it will be argued that

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[29] Ibid. p.63.

[30] As Sherry articulates this point: 'The shifting, elliptical discontinuous character of the poem's verbal surface certainly establishes a nervy modernity as its composite personality ... The poem obviously sets out to do more than simulate the sensorium of modern urban existence, however. The decentring of sensibility in the sequence recreates a state of individual dispossession. This is the establishing condition, we feel, of the whole poetic project, of a modernism that reconstitutes its current personages in terms of some underlying , abiding, unifying, and revitalising myth of literary and cultural tradition.' Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.217. Note especially here Sherry's sensitivity to the way Eliot attempted to convey in the poem a return to an ultimately mythic sense of order combined with an embrace of modernity.

maximal modernists identified as instances of decadence are somewhat subjective, and so through Sherry's lens we do not see the fact that Wells' own ideas also sought a radical renewal of society that not only embraced the technological advancements of modernity but also promoted a new political religion, to use his terminology, capable of re-unifying an allegedly decadent society. Further, as in many studies of British wartime cultural production, we are given little analysis of how Sherry's three case studies fitted into an emerging European paradigm of cultural modernism during the war.

Contrasting this acute sensitivity to the concerns of three, esoteric, England-based aesthetic modernists is George Robb's recent general survey of British wartime culture, written in the tradition of empirical history, *British Culture and the First World War.* Like Winter, Robb rightly highlights that scholars who attempt to characterise the war's entire cultural production either as 'traditional' or 'modernist' results in sterile scholarship. 'One could compile endless, rival lists', he continues, 'illustrating wartime changes and continuities without gaining a deeper understanding of the conflict'.[31] Of course, the point of cultural and intellectual history is not to simplistically produce lists, but rather to find ways in which such terminology can be applied in heuristically useful ways, in order to develop the 'deeper understanding' of either the modernist or the traditional aspects of the war's reception. However, as with Sherry, Hynes and Fussell, Robb offers little discussion on the European context of British cultural experiences. He also fails to develop a working model for modernism; again, as with Winter and others, we are left with only a very superficial understanding of what the term signifies. In order to move beyond simplistically drawing up a list of figures who presented the war as an event characterised more heavily by change than by continuity, it will be necessary to furnish this study with a coherent sense of what will be signified by the term 'modernism'.

Maximal modernist culture: radical confrontations with a modernity perceived as decadent

We have already seen that, in the scholarship on First World War cultural production, the terms 'modernism' and 'modernist' have been applied in a very wide-ranging fashion. On the one hand, they have been used to refer to a plethora of cultural production by scholars such as Stromberg and Eksteins, and on the other hand, they have been deployed in a far more limited way to a particular aesthetic phenomenon, as the work of Sherry exemplifies. Even in

[31] George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) p.3.

academic discourses that analyse literature and the visual arts, where the term is used with greater frequency than in cultural history, we still find both a lack of consensus and a reluctance to offer working definitions of the term. Exemplifying these problems is the literature on modernism aimed at undergraduate students. For example, Michael Levenson's *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* features many chapters from noted experts discussing variegated aspects of the topic, but its Introduction primarily seeks to argue why 'we' have now left the modernist era, instead of furnishing its readers with a succinct articulation of how students are supposed to understand the phenomenon as distinct from other trends in thought and cultural production.[32] Similarly, the introductory chapter to Peter Childs' *Modernism*, an otherwise edifying survey of the concept, describes how the term refers to cultural production that rejects realism and '"plunges" the reader into a confusing and difficult mental landscape which cannot be immediately understood', causing the reader to map this landscape 'in order to understand its limits and meanings', before claiming that his book would 'briefly sketch this landscape so that Modernism can be visible'.[33] Although subsequent chapters outline the ideas of key thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin and Friedrich Nietzsche, alongside important modernist artists, such as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Virginia Woolf, Childs never offers what might be called a working definition of the term.

Countering this approach to 'mapping' modernism, the remainder of this Introduction will discuss the boundaries of terminology adjacent to 'modernism' before offering an ideal typical description of the phenomenon itself. Following Eksteins' lead, this will be a deliberately broad, 'maximal' model of modernism, therefore it will be somewhat distinct from the narrower, aesthetic usage of the term by academics such as Sherry. As the following discussion will detail, this study will regard maximal modernist thought as cultural production marked by readings of existing modernity as decadent and that seeks to radically confront this decadence, either by somehow diagnosing this crisis or by developing a new sense of the transcendent as a resolution to the chaos of modernity; indeed, these two very broad categories of response are not mutually exclusive and are often intertwined. Maximal modernism, then, should not be thought of as all intellectual and cultural engagements with

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[32] Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[33] Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.4.

modernity; the radical aspect of modernism is a core quality – a point that this thesis will return to when examining Rupert Brooke. Such a characterisation of maximal modernism will need to be unpacked. By so doing, the following discussion will also offer a contextual backcloth for the case studies of British maximal modernist tendencies during the First World War that will be discussed in following chapters.

To begin unpacking the maximal modernism paradigm as a radical confrontation with a modernity perceived as decadent, then, let us begin with the key the term 'modernise'; a word that embraces a wide variety of inter-related phenomena. If one wants to grasp a minimum of what the variegated aspects of 'modernisation' produce, one recurring characteristic that can repeatedly be observed is that forms of modernisation not only transform the dynamics of material reality in some fashion, but also have an impact on underlying value systems of societies, although of course this sense of change occurs in myriad and irreducibly multifaceted ways. Put most generally, to live through modernisation is to live through change. To give the term some temporal markers in relation to European history, it is worth highlighting that the continent has experienced large scale patterns of modernisation from at least the latter period of the eighteenth century, arguably inculcating the condition that many academics and thinkers have dubbed 'modernity'. Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm's thesis, claiming that European modernisation was driven by the twin processes of the industrial revolution and the French Revolution, typifies a wider consensus in debates on the emergence of modernity that locates the condition in the large scale processes of modernisation occurring in European history from the late eighteenth century onwards.[34] Further, modernisation is distinct from 'modernity' as the former describes external conditions of change, whereas the latter signifies generalised, subjective interpretations of these myriad changes.

As with 'modernisation', then, the related term 'modernity' is riddled with variegated subtleties of meaning, although in general it is used to somehow signify abstractly the mentality of living during times of widespread modernisation. We can turn to a number of scholars in order to gain more nuanced understanding of ways in which this term can be

[34] See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789 – 1848* (London: Abacus, 1962). Similarly, in regard to European experiences of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman has claimed that this is a phenomenon which is impossible to date accurately, though in general terms it achieved a significant level of maturity in cultural terms during the Enlightenment, and in terms of wider societal mentalities, it came of age during the industrialisation of the nineteenth century. See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p.4.

used in a heuristically useful fashion. In his classic survey of the condition of modernity, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Marshall Berman presents a thesis that argues '[t]o be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and of the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are'. Because of this intense creative and destructive dynamic, tropes of flux, insecurity and a heightened awareness of the self as an autonomous actor within an increasingly complex and variegated society comprise predominant features of the experience of modernity, according to Berman. Highlighting a further characteristic of the condition, and echoing Wohl's identification of a pan-European 'generation of 1914', Berman also notes that modernity creates new unities of people that cut across established geographical, ethnic, national, and even religious boundaries, adding that, consequently, modernity 'is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'.[35] For Berman, then, the sense of change underpinning modernity may either be experienced positively, as an underlying sense of elemental change for the better, or negatively as senses of established orders falling away.

Touching on some similar themes, Zygmunt Bauman characterises modernity as a profound sense of ambivalence generated by a conflict between conceiving the modernising world as in a state of order and in a state of chaos. In *Modernity and Ambivalence*, he offers the following abstract description of the mentality of modernity: 'We can think of modernity as of a time when order – of the world, of the human habitat, of the human self, and of the connection between all three – is reflected upon; a matter of thought, of concern, of a practice that is aware of itself, conscious of being a conscious practice and wary of the void it would leave if it were to halt or merely relent'.[36] In other words, Bauman both emphasises that modernity is a 'reflexive' state and suggests that it is a condition where heightened self-awareness has the potential to undermine myriad established cultural patterns and value systems. Further, although it can corrode received knowledge, modernity's probing, questioning, self-reflexive consciousness does not necessarily offer new certainties to fill the existential void thus created. Especially significant here, then, is Bauman's sensitivity to ways

[35] Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1982), esp. pp.15–36.
[36] Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p.5.

in which modernity can inculcate a sense of the falling away of the most profound ontological truths, senses of order often created by religious paradigms, but also by established senses of political sovereignty, ostensible laws of physics, established aesthetic forms, and so on. Once deep-seated, established norms – an underlying sense of nomic order – begin to become subject to erosion, especially through scientific enquiry and political changes that have characterised post-Enlightenment European history, the potential for diverse forms of existential questioning, and even existential crises – nomic crises or *anomie* – are inherently increased, revealing to modernity's more sensitive inhabitants its deeply chaotic aspect. Of course, a mentality of self-reflexivity leading to existential questioning is not a blanket description that can be applied to all people living within rapidly modernising societies. However, it is one that can be used to ask research questions regarding how and why thinkers and artists whose work has consciously engaged with the chaotic, as opposed to the orderly, experiences of modernity have generated ideas that attempted to make sense of modernity as crisis. Indeed, it was specifically this chaotic aspect of modernity that maximal modernist thinking attempted to resolve. Consequently, modernity is a particularly useful term for inquiring into a sensitivity that has overwhelmed many intellectuals in modernising European societies, especially since the turn of the nineteenth century; figures who have become acutely aware of a breakdown in the authority of received values, be they religious, monarchical, political, scientific, cultural, and so forth. Not only can a distinct lack of certainty in life, a lack of 'givenness', characterise the mindset of those living within modernity, but specifically when modernity is regarded as profoundly out-of-joint by intellectuals sensitive to these ambivalence generating, and even chaotic qualities, of modernity, then their thinking can become impregnated with maximal modernism.

One thinker particularly sensitive to these corrosive and ambivalent aspects of modernity, writing around the time of the First World War, was Max Weber. Typifying wider trends in European thought of the period, his critique of modernity characterised the condition as a profound rupture in European cultural history ushering in an 'iron cage of rationalism'[37] for all modernising industrial societies. According to Weber, modernisation not only tore apart previously held ontological certainties, but also replaced them with rational, bureaucratic schemas for organising the social order that failed to offer emotive senses of

[37] See especially: Max Weber (translated by Talcott Parsons), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

community. Indeed, Weber extended this thesis during the war in his lecture "Science as a Vocation", which argued that 'the fate of our time is characterised by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"', and that 'the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life'.[38] What is important to take from Weber's argument is that, as a consequence of its 'disenchanting' aspect, modernity can also produce countervailing senses of 're-enchantment' to life, ideas that somehow search for new notions that impart an underlying sense of emotive and even metaphysical certainty, and that are capable of providing renewed senses of ontological security – of nomic order. We can see many instances of modernity creating anew senses of community and of homelands, for example with the rise of populist nationalisms in Europe, especially from the early nineteenth century onwards,[39] the various international notions of class identity, new senses of community predicated upon racial ideals, in Wohl's identification of generational consciousness, and so on. Indeed, especially by the late nineteenth century, the phenomenon of a growing awareness of the corrosive aspects of modernity also led to what Hobsbawm and Ranger dub the 'invention of tradition' offering Europeans an often mythologized sense of historic continuity with a more distant past.[40]

One of the most radical and influential of the thinkers whose ideas impacted upon this growing sense of 'disenchantment' and crisis within European intellectuals' consciousness before the war was Friedrich Nietzsche. To cite just one example of this mood in his writings, in the following extract from *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche identified the notion that modernity created the need to generate anew concepts that offer a deeper significance to modern life:

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[38] Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation' in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.155.

[39] For more on how modernity has created senses of nationalism, see Ernst Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* Revised Edition (London: Verso, 2002).

[40] Hobsbawm and Ranger's distinction between societies unconsciously repeating sets of cultural practise over many generations, and of people dedicating themselves to maintaining what has become considered consciously as a tradition, thereby conveying a sense of continuity with the past, is a subtle, but important, differentiation. The latter is typical of modernity, as only from the perspective of a culture that is aware that key aspects of what have become defining aspects of their cultural identity may be eroded, a society aware of its own potential finitude, can cultural practises be regarded as trends that can either be lost or actively maintained as 'traditions'. See: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

> Now the man bereft of myth stands eternally starving among all the past ages and digs and rummages in search of roots, even in the most remote of ancient worlds. What does the tremendous historical need of this dissatisfied modern culture, the collection of countless other cultures, the consuming desire for knowledge, point to, if not to the loss of myth, the loss of the mythic home, of the mythic maternal womb?[41]

It is difficult to imagine a more concise articulation of the sense of rootlessness that can be generated by exposure to modernity. Nietzsche's writings emphasised that modernity produced a sense of dislocation with the past, yet also created new desires to re-discover 'mythic wombs'. Rather than regarding this deployment of the word 'mythic' in Nietzsche's context as a signifier synonymous merely with fiction, we should see 'myth' in this sense as signifying conceptual metaphors capable of imparting a sense of deeper meaning to life, a renewed sense of logos capable of filling existence with the sense of a transcendent, 'higher' order that, as Weber typified, many intellectuals believed was being eroded by modernity.[42] Nietzsche was far more critical than Weber of the cultural impact of the Enlightenment pursuit of scientific thought, a trend that he too believed was inculcating a widespread positivist milieu that undermined types of knowledge that affect one's sense of being in the world, and replaced this type of knowledge with empirical facts and figures; a point echoed by many intellectuals from the later half of the nineteenth century onwards. Indeed, Nietzsche's philosophy was but one of many instances of cultural production that presented widespread modernisation as a force undermining the tendency to perceive reality through authentic religious, poetic or mythic lenses, and therefore read the emergence of modernity as a regressive step for mankind.[43]

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[41] Friedrich Nietzsche (translated by Douglas Smith), *The Birth Of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.123.

[42] For Nietzsche, the governing myth for interpreting history was to regard it as a cosmic battle between the two opposing forces of Dionysus and Apollo. This dialectic allowed Nietzsche to create a reading of human history ultimately as a metaphysical struggle between Apollo symbolising order and stability, and Dionysus, representing chaos and creation. For a detailed survey of Nietzsche's thought, see: Eugene Fink (translated by Goetz Richter), *Nietzsche's Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003).

[43] Another prominent figure here was Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinshshaft*. See: Ferdinand Tönnies (translated by Charles P. Loomis), *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)* (New York: Dover, 2002).

Consequently, when analysing the cultural production marked by sensitivity to modernity, it is important to identify to what extent intellectuals perceived their contemporary reality through a lens of evolution and innovation leading to progress for humanity, or, as with figures such as Nietzsche, regarded the present through the lens of chaos and crisis. Indeed, the former viewpoint is epitomised by the myth of progress, the ultimately teleological belief that the pursuit of rationalism and liberal ideals will inevitably lead humanity into better and better worlds, a perspective that has long been critiqued as an iron law of history. The latter is typified by intellectuals who regard modernity as regression, of the present being defined by pervasive sense of decline and fall, of the order of things coming under attack, of norms being subverted to the point of absurdity, in short, of the present manifesting, in some form, 'decadence'. To add a further distinction, maximal modernists could either revel in the sense of a world in decline as a muse for thought and art, or draw on this sensitivity to the chaos of modernity to develop a programmatic solution and develop an alternate modernity in order to escape decadence. Indeed, it is such diagnoses of decadence that fueled radical confrontations with modernity for many intellectuals. Although this binary distinction between progressive and chaotic versions of modernity is a gross oversimplification, it is again proposed here in the spirit of presenting us with a research question: how and to what extent does a particular thinker regard his or her view of a modernising world through the lens of evolution and progress, or though the lens of chaos and decadence? As will become apparent, the sense of modernity as decadence – which may be articulated in numerous ways including societal fragmentation, moral standards becoming corrupted, religious truths being devalued, and the individual losing his or her own autonomy within wider society – is an important trope in the maximal model of modernist thought that will be employed in the course of this study.[44]

In order to locate some intellectual roots regarding this maximal modernist temperament of radically confronting an experience of modernity as decadence, aside from Nietzscheanism, we can also turn to Karl Marx. Indeed, Marxism offered one of the earliest and most influential critiques of the Enlightenment myth of modernity as a perpetual state of progress. The core point of Marxism was to argue that the rising bourgeois class would

[44] For a far more lengthy and nuanced discussion of the importance of a sense of decadence to the condition of modernity, see: Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) pp.149–221.

eventually create enough contradictions within their economic system for the all powerful dialectic of historical materialism to swing into action, resulting in a revolution of the economic base of society. From the decline of capitalist society into a state of bourgeois decadence, a fundamental shift in human history would occur, redeeming the suffering and misery of the proletariat under capitalism. Although embracing an ultimately positive historicism that ostensibly promoted a rational mindset, the ideology was a highly influential mythopoeic system of thought that argued a decadent aspect of the present portended revolution and redemption in the future. More generally, this was a trope that began to take hold of the European imagination, at least among radical sections of the continent's intelligentsia, during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The lasting power of Marxism has been the ability for its core principles to be modified by a diverse range of theorists such as Georges Sorel, Vladimir Lenin, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, and even in recent years Jacques Derrida, in order to present ever new plausible variants of the core myth of bourgeois decadence leading to proletarian rebirth.[45] For Marxists and Nietzscheans,[46] then, bourgeois modernity could easily be regarded as a realm infested by decadence. Indeed, we will see how Marxist principles could be fused with other ideas, especially Nietzschean philosophy, in the chapters on Orage and *The New Age*. As widespread modernisation inculcated dramatic changes during the nineteenth century, positive receptions that regarded modernity as progress were increasingly challenged by pessimistic readings of the deeper meaning of modernity. As with Marx and Nietzsche, myriad readings of modernity highlighted not only sensitivity to decline and fall, but also counterpointed pessimism with visions of new worlds emerging from the antinomies of the present. This wider sensitivity to ideas of endings and new beginnings in all aspects of thought is key to the maximal modernist paradigm being sketched out here.

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[45] As Stromberg pointed out, concerning the idea of war in the early twentieth century, many socialists regarded a Europe-wide conflagration as a key aspect of the emergence of the new order. Consequently, before 1914 they regarded 'the coming of war with considerable equanimity, as (a) inevitable under capitalism, (b) certain to advance the course of historical development in some way, (c) likely to lead to the socialist revolution in one way or another'. Stromberg, *Redemption by War*, p.119. Through this historicist logic, then, it was entirely plausible to many socialists that fighting for one's country and aspiring towards the coming class revolution were complementary, not contradictory, ideas.

[46] Writing in a very different register, Nietzsche was also deeply concerned with creating a philosophy that regarded modernity as decadent and highlighted the need for a fundamental 'transvaluation of all values'. Juxtaposed with a future society led by his redemptive *Übermensch* figure – a fictional being whose will to power would lead to the return of a time when European society was guided by poetically inspired 'great men' – the core of his philosophy argued that the foundation of European society, in this case the moral order of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, was profoundly decadent.

Because maximal modernist thought seeks somehow to address modernity's decadence and sometimes even to re-invest modernity with a sense of hope and higher purpose, it is important to recognise that maximal modernism does not destroy senses of the sacred or the need to find 'higher' transcendent meaning to life, and is not simply synonymous with secularised cultural production – for example, as Winter's binary implies. Rather, not only is maximal modernist thought cultural production impregnated with a sense of temporality that responds to the secularisation of knowledge, but also it is often marked by the desire to develop and articulate a renewed sense of transcendent meaning to life in the face of the secularising, rational forces of modernity – Darwin's impact, and attempts to counter it such as Bergson's *élan vital*, are especially resonant here. It is this radical confrontation with the alleged base elements of a decadent modernity that characterises maximal modernism. Frank Kermode's renowned lecture series *The Sense of an Ending* talks instructively to this point. He argues that a central characteristic of modernist intellectual output was the identification of a 'sense of an ending' in the cultural construction of time, revealed by apocalyptic representations of the present, alongside an embrace of cyclic conceptions of history.[47] Modernists, according to Kermode, became highly critical of rational constructions of clock time, of human temporality characterised by an endlessly flowing state of rectilinear *chronos* – divided into equal units of seconds, minutes, hours etc. – and counterpointed rationalised conception of time with ideas that sought to reconnect with a 'higher' appreciation of temporality and existence, expressed through elisions between senses of crisis and the notion of opportunity for creativity and fundamental renewal, a sense of temporality that he dubbed *kairos*.[48] (Samuel Beckett's two tramps in *Waiting for Godot* offer a memorable incarnation of this trope of crisis of clock time.) This desire for a subjective and poetic 'higher' time to emerge as an answer to the awareness of a state of

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[47] Similarly, Louise Blakeney Williams, has also emphasised this point, arguing that cyclical interpretations of historical change allowed 'Modernists to accept change confidently because it ensured a permanence and stability underlying the flux, and because it inspired the conviction that the past was always present and would soon return. See: Louise Blakeney Williams, *Modernism and the Ideology of History: Literature, Politics, and the Past.* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2002.) p.208.

[48] Indeed, this trope can be seen in a diverse range of modernist thought. One example of the desire for a new form of temporality to emerge, redeeming the world, can be found in Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History". For example, "Thesis XIV" refers to his concept of *Jetztzeit*, or now time. This drew on a sense of the eternal, the *nunc stans*, entering into the flow of history charging the present with inspiration imaginings of the past so that it could literally felt to live again, thereby forcing forward the, ultimately mythic, dialectical process of revolutionary Marxism. For Benjamin, this would both render the future into the present, and create a mystical leap into the future. See: Walter Benjamin (translated by Harry Zorn), *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999) p.245–255.

crisis in the present, specifically conceived as an escape from the relentless 'tick' 'tock'[49] of rectilinear clock time, could be found in myriad versions in modernist cultural production. For Kermode, then, at the heart of modernist thought lies an ability to offer a sense of reconnection with a 'higher' temporal awareness, thereby offering albeit temporary senses of escape from the *chronos* of modernity's relentless myth of progress. Ultimately, for Kermode rectilinear clock time was felt to be destructive of poetic conceptions of time and reality by modernists, and so, from our perspective, this could even be considered as the epitome of maximal modernism's identification of modernity's decadence.

Aside from economic and moral philosophy of Marx and Nietzsche, then, literature and the arts have been highly significant cultural arenas in which the progressive and orderly qualities of modernity have been radically critiqued, and notions of modernity's alleged promotion of rational thought as possessing decadent aspects have been extensively articulated. This is a trend that can be located at least from the emergence of critical responses to the Enlightenment. For example, whereas schools of thought promoting rationalism and Whiggish notions of progress, such as Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism, emerged from around the turn of the nineteenth century onwards, many of the artists who comprised the Romantic Movement across Europe tended to define their ideals as counter to the rationalism of their predecessors and rather embraced poetic comportments concerned with 'inner' development over materialism.[50] This highly variegated tendency ranged from the religious fanaticism that characterised William Blake's visions of angels and his emphasis on the world of the imagination dominating over materialism and rationalism; to Percy Shelly's embrace of anarchism, philosophical idealism and atheism; to Lord Byron's close identification with the Greek War of Independence; to Thomas Carlyle's combination of history as hero worship and identification of 'The Condition of England' question that

[49] Kermode played on the 'tick tock' sound of clocks when articulating his model of plots, 'ticks' represent genesis and beginnings, whereas 'tocks' signify apocalypses and endings. Between the 'tick' and the 'tock', he continued, lay a comforting sense of stability and order, whereas between the 'tock' and a subsequent tick lay an interregnum, an apocalyptic moment waiting for a new tick to create a sense of renewal and order. Modernist thought, through this lens, was characterised by a sense of time between a 'tock' and a 'tick', it was marked by a sense of an ending that was expecting a new beginning. See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[50] As Roland Stromberg has phrased this point, 'Romanticism began in *reaction against* the eighteenth century, that is, against rationalism, mechanistic materialism, Classicism, all the dominant ingredients of the Enlightenment ... Youth looked for new ideas and found them in Rousseau, subsequently in Kant, Fichte, Burke. A chief weakness in the Enlightenment was its neglect of the imagination, its externalism and absence of anything inward or deeply esthetic.' See Roland Stromberg, *European Intellectual History since 1789* (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1968).

influenced subsequent generations of authors, including Wells; to the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The roots of maximal modernist thought as an escape from a progressive mindset and seemingly one-dimensional rationalism, then, can be found in what is referred to as Romanticism, another highly contentious term that this study has little time to explore in any detail.[51] Broadly speaking though, what distinguishes Romanticism from maximal modernism is the sensitivity to a profound sense of decadence manifest in the latter that calls for a more fundamental sense of crisis and even need for change. Whereas Romantics often felt an underlying tone of contiguity with the Enlightenment, those being dubbed maximal modernists were more radical and regularly critiqued the rational and positivist ways of comprehending the world that emerged during the earlier half of the nineteenth century; often to the point whereby a mood of all encompassing crisis became manifest, and a new move towards the re-enchantment of the world was necessary to restore a sense of nomic order.

Typifying the trend to regard rational and progressive aspects of modernity as decadent, we can turn to one of the most influential artists of the nineteenth century, at least for subsequent generations of maximal modernists, Charles Baudelaire. Famously, in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life", Baudelaire stated that modernity had become detached from any single guiding ideal, and represented 'the transient, the fleeting, the contingent', which was now 'the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable'.[52] Reflecting this observation, Baudelaire's sets of poems and prose poems, *Les fleurs du mal* and *Le spleen de Paris*, developed an aesthetic ideal that clearly regarded the modernity of mid-nineteenth century France as decadent, yet saw the modern artist's duty to somehow distil a new sense of beauty from the seemingly profane milieu that surrounded him. Baudelaire's response to his reading of modernity as decadent was typical of a major trend in what would become a defining aspect of maximal modernist aesthetics: the identification of a sense of cultural crisis, combined with the development of a novel aesthetic approach, in order to discover new sets of principles capable of reconfiguring the decadent qualities of modernity

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[51] For a brief history of Romanticism, see: Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (London: Pimlico, 2000). Here Berlin comes close to defining the movement as cultural production marked by a sense of attempting breaking up existing senses of order combined with a mythopoeic reconnection with sense of mythology, with idealised pasts, with neglected Gods, and so forth. For a detailed examination of the phenomenon, see: Michael O'Neill and Mark Sandy (eds.), *Romanticism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[52] 'The Painter of Modern Life' in Charles Baudelaire (translated by P. E. Charvet), *Selected Writings on Art and Literature* (London: Penguin, 2006) pp.390–435.

into an art form that offered a rehabilitated articulation of mythic, 'higher' values, initially by introducing critiques of modernity through traditional stylistic forms before revolutionising form as well as content. Maximal modernism in art, then, attempted to present fragments of imaginative, transcendent *kairos* emerging from the decadent *chronos* of material reality. Cultural production thus construed could at least temporarily present access to mythic refuges, offering to sensitive inhabitants of modernity's variegated cultural crises a focus for their desires of escape from the overpowering senses of catastrophe that could be unleashed once modernity's 'decadent' qualities appeared to overtake its 'progressive' ones. Symbolist poets such as Arthur Rimbaud; decadent writers such as Oscar Wilde; Expressionist painters such as Wassily Kandinsky; and novelists such as James Joyce, can all be seen as figures developing an aesthetic that followed this general trend in art. Artists such as these, figures acting as alchemists transforming the base qualities of modernity's decadence into renewed senses of the transcendent, were central to the aesthetic modernist movement. Indeed, maximal modernism in art can be characterised by a sense of chiaroscuro between the darkness of modernity's decadence and the light of renewed transcendent ideals. However, rather than focusing on modernism in the aesthetic realm alone, the maximal modernism paradigm seeks to radically extend the usage of the term into other fields of thought.

Reflecting on many of these cultural dynamics of modernity, in *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey has offered an important discussion on the materialisation of the modernist movement in Europe, which he dated as emerging from around the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and especially from the 1890s. Harvey too highlights how highly influential figures such as Marx, Baudelaire and later Nietzsche epitomised both the rejection of the hopeful sense of progress that had been developed during the Enlightenment era, alongside sensitivity to the destructive yet creative powers of modernity, and in so doing replaced the myth of progress with ideas of creative destruction. For Harvey, the latter formed the underlying tenor of modernist thought. By identifying what fundamental values needed to be destroyed, according to Harvey modernists could point towards what could be created in the wake of large-scale destruction.[53] Intellectuals as

[53] See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) esp. ch.2.

diverse as William Morris,[54] Joseph Schumpeter and even Albert Speer were included in Harvey's analysis of key modernist figures. Consequently, Harvey's sensitivity to the creative destructive paradox of what he identified very broadly as the modernist movement underscored how such cultural production and thought sought to capture modernity's dynamic of elemental change. It did so in a radicalised form, and attempted to articulate an idenfication of what needed to be destroyed and what needed to be renewed in cultural, aesthetic, political, and / or philosophical registers. This generic identification of the modernist movement as a set of diverse ideals that emphasises both destruction and creation is central to Harvey's discussions on the phenomenon. Indeed, destroying decadence in order to clear the way for modernist-style regeneration was a formula that could be applied to myriad systems of though and action, from aesthetics to philosophy, and from architecture to new mass ideologies.

In order to signify the distinct, radical nature of maximal modernist forms of regeneration conceived as an escape form a decadent world, and especially to signify its concern with developing renewed connections with a sense of the transcendent (a phenomenon that is probably a universal aspect of human nature in one form or another[55]) we can use the term 'palingenesis'.[56] Already familiar to scholars of generic fascism,[57] this term, broadly speaking synonymous with 'rebirth', will be used by this study to signify a renewed connection with a 'higher', mythic sense of existence, though in a modernised format. Therefore, Baudelaire's desire to distil higher artistic expression from the dingy realities of the seamier side of mid-nineteenth century Paris; Haussmann's renovation of that

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[54] William Morris was another key influence on many of the case studies of this study. Indeed, his politics, especially articulated through the highly influential *News From Nowhere* included a typical manifestation of what this study dubs political modernism because it projected revolution into the near future, and foresaw the redemption of society under an alternate modernity, albeit one heavily influenced by the ideals of an idealised Middle Ages. This vision of a destruction of capitalism's commercial realm and synthesis between Marxist ideals of a revolution of the economic base of society and the notion that the Middle Ages manifested a realm of greater ontological security, a social order that needed to be recreated in a modernised format to fit the future, would become a central tenet of guild socialism, as we will see in the first two chapters of this study. For more on Morris, see: Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for our Times* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).

[55] For a detailed though highly speculative discussion on this phenomenon, arguing that a sense of the transcendent has been a key aspect of human history, see: Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd. 1967).

[56] The term is derived from the Greek 'palin' again, and 'genesis' birth. In philosophical discourses, the term has been used to signify the rebirth of the soul in a new body.

[57] Roger Griffin has used the term to signify the myth of national rebirth that was central to fascist political discourses, which claimed that they alone held the potential to renew the nation's organic 'soul'. See Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, Routledge, 1993).

city; Kandinsky's notion of the spiritual in art; Nietzsche's redemptive *Übermensch* figure; and Marx's prophecy of class revolution wiping away bourgeois decadence, are all instances of what this study will call the trope of palingenesis. Although each of these examples obviously represent highly idiosyncratic phenomena, they are each also variegated articulations of a sense of escape from modernity as decadence, and offer glimpses of new realities – alternate modernities and / or transcendent spiritual realms – thereby seeking to resolve in a radical fashion allegedly chaotic aspects of contemporary modernity. The heuristic value of palingenesis for comparative history, then, is precisely the fact that it does not limit inquiry into a single intellectual system; rather it promotes the idea of contrasting how very different, often incompatible, modes of thought developed variegated types of palingenesis from radically diverse ideologies.

Indeed, given the socio-political as well as cultural modelling of maximal modernism by this study, it is also worth adding some boundaries to the term 'ideology' in regard to maximal modernist cultural production. In general, the term 'ideology' is used by this study to signify various dynamic, collectively held systems of ideas and beliefs that can offer something approaching a consistent world-view, and through which the chaos of modernity can be imbued with a sense of order. Further, ideologies offer inhabitants of modernity a sense of identity and tend to instil a normative purpose to life, especially when advanced in discernable political forms, such as communism, liberalism, conservatism, socialism and so forth. In various complex and multifaceted ways, then, ideologies can act either as cultural systems that recapitulate and therefore maintain the status quo, or as systems of thought that develop radical innovations seeking to move beyond received values.[58] One especially lucid example of a political theorist who was sensitive to the cultural aspect of ideologies in the modern era was the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. Eschewing simplistic Marxist concepts of ideology, his nuanced model of cultural hegemony, and of 'organic intellectuals' and 'traditional intellectuals', was dedicated to understanding how differing relationships between cultural production and political power underpinned the Janus faced quality of ideologies.[59] Concerning maximal modernism, then, because of a desire to articulate radically

[58] Discussion on the various dimensions of the term, including contributions by Louis Althusser, Terry Eagleton, Richard Rorty and Slavoj Zizek can be found in the edited volume by Slavoj Zizek (ed.) *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994).

[59] Gramsci's model argued that cultural production within the civil societies of modernity could be broken down into two broad categories, 'traditional' and 'organic'. The battle for domination of mindsets of the

notions of the new, the output postulated by members of what Gramsci's theory dubbed the 'organic intelligentsia' is broadly cognate with the concept of maximal modernist thought – i.e. figures counterpointing mainstream thinking with radical perspectives and worldviews promoting elemental transition and renewal. Regarding the pattern of intellectuals embracing a moment of historical crisis, and reading events as an opportunity for fundamental change, we are again reminded of the pattern analysed by Wohl, Stromberg and especially Eksteins. During the First World War, then, in Gramscian terminology we can see that many intellectuals acted out the role of the 'organic intellectual', regarding the apocalyptic, yet regenerative, qualities of the war as an ideal time for their ideas for radical change to be realised. Indeed, aspects of these 'wars of position' and 'wars of manoeuvre' are the primary interest of this study.

As we have already seen in analyses by Wohl, Stromberg, Mosse and Eksteins, academic studies of these Gramscian 'wars of position' and 'wars of manoeuvre' need to be aware of the fact that the origins of these intellectual battles were often rooted in a cultural sea-change that dated from around the end of the nineteenth century. Unsurprisingly, then, one salient point that shines through much of the secondary literature examining European cultural history and maximal modernist thought from around the eighteen-nineties until the First World War is that many thinkers and artists at this time were acutely concerned with developing ideas that rejected the scientific, positivist worldviews that had become deeply associated with the nineteenth century. Norman Stone, for example, concludes that, in 'the early years of the twentieth century ... there was an intellectual and cultural revolution', therefore, 'the old world of nineteenth century absolutes had been dealt a mortal death blow,

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inhabitants of modernity, then, is fought within the cultural sphere. 'Traditional' cultural production effectively maintains aspects of political power by disseminating cultural products that reinforce the legitimacy of existing political and cultural authority, whereas organic cultural production is generated by figures who seek to break down received norms, power structures, philosophies of life, and so forth, and in so doing attempt to subvert extant power structures. Radical ideologies, then, can become imbedded within cultural production, even within the most sophisticated forms of art and philosophy, and are generated by figures Gramsci dubbed 'organic intellectuals'. Collectively at least, such figures are revolutionaries whose output served two processes. They initially outline intellectual arguments for fundamental cultural or political change, a process Gramsci dubbed a 'war of position', before more radical sections of the 'organic' intelligentsia seize on a moment of crisis to spontaneously achieve fundamental political, social or cultural changes, what he dubbed 'wars of manoeuvre'. Therefore times of crises in the political or economic realms are also hegemonic crises that extended into cultural production, and the battle for political continuity and change was voraciously fought out in a variety of media during such times. See: Antonio Gramsci (translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971). For a summary of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, see: Thomas Bates, 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.36/no.2 (1975), pp. 351–366.

long before 1914'.[60] Unsurprisingly, academics such as Frank Kermode, David Harvey and Malcolm Bradbury[61] also tend to identify a distinct modernist movement coming of age from around the eighteen-nineties and the early years of the twentieth century onwards, a development with roots in the Romantic movement, but by this point far more politically and culturally radical.

In his influential work identifying a revolution in European thinking from around this period, *Consciousness and Society*, H. Stuart Hughes coins the term 'the revolt against positivism' to describe this revolution in cultural production. His thesis claims that, roughly between the 1890s and the 1930s, European culture was gripped by trends of social thinking and artistic production that regarded older, rationalist and more mechanistic schema for conceptualising the human condition as essentially outdated. The label 'positivism' became a pejorative catchall term for the variety of trends in intellectual and philosophical discourse that were associated with the rational models characterising much of nineteenth century social thought. 'Positivism' thus defined extended beyond its normal boundaries as a signifier for scientific and logical thought in philosophy, and, as Hughes puts it, came to signify a general tendency to 'discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural science'.[62] In its place came newer variants of social thought, articulated in influential academic and artistic discourses. These ideas not only drew on the styles and approaches of positivism, but also took far more seriously notions of emotion and intuition within their methodologies. For example, Bergson's concept of the *élan vital* synthesised a poetic interpretation of the natural world with scientific conceptions of evolution, and the Bergson cult was highly influential on the thinking of many prewar intellectuals. This was also the era of the Schopenhauer cult, Durkheim's concept of *anomie*, Theosophy, and scientistic racial ideologies, as presented by intellectuals such as Houston Stuart Chamberlain and Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau. This combination between rhetorical tropes of positivism and a rejection of positivist certainties was epitomised by the thinking of Sigmund Freud, who articulated his new science of human emotions in an assiduously rational and scientific style of discourse – the presentation of research papers, the testing of hypotheses through case

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[60] Norman Stone, *Europe Transformed 1878 – 1919* (London: Fontana Press, 1985) p.404.
[61] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890 – 1930* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).
[62] H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reformation of European Social Thought 1890 – 1930* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979) p.37.

studies, and so forth. What this trend amounted to was a radical subversion of the hegemonic Enlightenment concept of man as a rational being. New schools of social thinking, especially psychoanalysis, now postulated persuasive arguments that demonstrated why humans were irrational beings, bundles of thoughts and memories detached from any rationally discernable higher purpose. These new intellectual systems also sought to diagnose and even to offer cures for mankind in this new era of self-consciousness.

Alongside this radicalisation of social thought, Europeans of this period were also bombarded by a sudden increase in technological advancements, especially from around the 1880s onwards. Cultural historians have posited the concept of a 'second' industrial revolution to describe this sudden influx of modernisation. In terms of technology, this shift included phenomena such as: mass electrification; the telephone; international telegraphic communications; mass public transport systems; bicycles, motorcars, high speed ocean liners and aeroplanes; advances in architecture, especially as a result of the electric light bulb and air conditioning; the cinema; advances in the production of chemicals and synthetic materials, and so on. Some historians also argue that, as a consequence, a fundamental shift in the quality of life occurred around this period.[63] In his *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880 – 1918*, Steven Kern emphasises that subjective senses of an increase in the 'pace' of life occurred at this time, alongside a new, globalised sense of temporality reflecting the increasingly interconnected nature of the modern world, epitomised by the emergence of World Standard Time. Further, by the late nineteenth century advances in telecommunications and mass media had led to a substantial increase in the awareness of concurrent actions, creating increased realisation of synchronicity between a sense of 'here and now' and related events in distant parts of the globe, all of which, he argues, changed constructions of time and 'worked to create the vast extended present of simultaneity'.[64] Complementing Kern's thesis is the classic analysis of Europe at the turn of the century by Jan Romein, *The Watershed of Two Eras*. His exhaustive study highlighted how fundamental transitions occurred simultaneously in fields as diverse as physics, biology, mathematics, law, aesthetics, geopolitics, national identity, technology, politics, religion, philosophy, and so

[63] A point that Geoffrey Baraclough made by stating if one returned to the 1870s modernising society, even Britain's, then one would find oneself in an alien world, however, retuning to the 1900s as a result of technological advances one would find oneself in broadly familiar ground. See: Michael D. Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses: Ideas and Society in Europe Since 1870* (London: Penguin Books, 1977) p.31.

[64] Steven Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880 – 1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) p.318.

on.[65] If we think of modernity as the experience of living through change, then the intensity of modernity in this historical period was particularly extreme for many people, creating an intelligentsia across Europe that was deeply sensitive to the destruction of old ways of life and the emergence of new modes of living.

Epitomising analyses that present not only a change in material reality but also in the realm of perceptions, at least within the European intelligentsia of this period, is Ronald Schleifer's *Modernism and Time.* Schleifer's thesis combines both the sense of a material and an intellectual crisis in European history during the 1890 – 1930 period. Regarding the material crisis, he argues that the massive increase in consumable production – i.e. the birth pangs of the commodification of society – dates from around the 1880s, undermining earlier understandings of economic relationships, such as those of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. In its place a far more complex association between capitalist and worker developed, especially concerning the proletariat's growing disposable income. Regarding the intellectual crisis, the professionalisation of many new academic disciplines, such as sociology and psychology, alongside the rapid growth in the sciences, began to produce an abundance of research, both technical and philosophical, thereby not only creating a wealth of new data but also an exponential growth in the variety of systems of thought with which this information could be interpreted. As a result of the growth in the production of both material goods and knowledge, Schleifer argues that a new 'logic of abundance' developed in Europe from the last decades of the nineteenth century. In terms of predominant moods, he emphasises that this 'second' industrial revolution was marked by increased senses of 'panic, free-floating anxiety, bewilderment, and a pervading sense of crisis'.[66] Further, attempting to illustrate the essence of this shift, Schleifer describes the transformation to the 'logic of abundance' in terms of a radical change in the construction of time. Echoing Hughes' and especially Kermode's analyses, the cultural models for understanding temporality that were developed from within this milieu tended to be not only far more openly subjective and intuitive, but the phenomenological properties of time, especially in intellectual circles, were marked by a 'ubiquitous and often unnoticed transformation' where 'the experience of time' was

[65] Jan Romein (translated by Arnold J. Pomerans), *The Watershed of Two Eras: Europe in 1900* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1978).
[66] Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time. The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.9.

'conditioned [by] the apocalyptic sense of the "new" – a "crisis consciousness"'.[67] Schleifer's thesis argues that this 'crisis consciousness' was a hallmark of modernist thought, and was capable of both diagnosing the decadence of modernity, as well as revealing its new possibilities.

In sum, we can see that maximal modernism was a response to a particular reading of modernity, and is distinct from the more general meaning of modernity as signifying the many responses to living through, and with the effects of, modernisation. From the late eighteenth century Europe was subject to intense modernisation, and this was especially the case in the period immediately before the First World War. This wholesale modernisation of European society, both material and intellectual, created many cultural responses to modernity, including an awareness of modernity as a chaotic condition, among highly diverse intellectuals. Further, sensitivity to the chaos that was seemingly created by rapid modernisation was often diagnosed as the emergence of a decadent world by the more radical intellectuals of this era, including in Britain. This sensitivity to decadence could be refracted through many forms of thought, ranging from philosophers, including Marx or Nietzsche, to writers, poets and artists, including Baudelaire and Kandinsky. In order to signify this diversity of critiques of a decadent modernity that emerged at this time, we can use the term maximal modernist thought, which can be applied not only to the arts but more generally to philosophy and social thinking. Following Eksteins, maximal modernism identifies 'modernism' not merely in aesthetics, but rather in all forms of intellectual discourse. Further, in so doing, it does not simplistically argue that different ideas that can be classed as maximal modernism are compatible with each other. Rather, by opening up the term 'modernism' to a wider set of ideas in this way, the paradigm will present a comparative framework which encourages empirically based research that can use the theory to draw out the great differences between highly diffuse forms of maximal modernism. Of course, the findings of comparative study not only include the similarities that can be observed, but also the differences between intellectuals that are highlighted via such analysis. Therefore, archival research highlighting the different variants of thought that fit the model is an essential component of this form of analysis, and so the paradigm actively promotes fresh empirical research to help establish these nuances.

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[67] Ibid. p.10.

An ideal type of maximal modernist thought

From this extended discussion of terminology adjacent to 'modernism', and a summary of some of its historical roots and causes, it is now possible to formulate a working model of how maximal modernism will be understood by this study. It should be noted that this model is proposed merely as an instance of a methodological tool that has been described by Max Weber's sociology as an ideal type, an ultimately fictional academic construct that bears a useful relationship to the reality that it seeks to describe; broadly speaking, intellectual history's equivalent to the outline sketches of organs in biology textbooks.[68] The following description, then, is offered in the spirit of forwarding a heuristic model that, specifically, does not claim to be an ultimate definition of maximal modernism's essential qualities, merely a useful mental picture for empirically identifying and dissecting maximal modernist aspects of cultural production through archival research. Further, because it seeks to distinguish between different aspects of maximal modernist thought, it does not view the phenomenon as an attitude restricted to a single field, such as aesthetics. Consequently, the following model is specifically designed to allow for the identification of maximal modernist tendencies within various aspects of cultural production, artefacts that may also be marked by distinctly non-modernist tropes.

Maximal Modernism: *A heuristically useful generic term signifying a highly heterogeneous variety of radical cultural phenomena that have emerged largely as a result of the rapid modernisation of European material and mental realities from the 'Dual Revolution' of the French and industrial revolutions onwards, and especially from around the 1890s. These diverse, and often contrary and intellectually incompatible, instances of cultural production possessed the common denominator of interpreting the modern world as a realm characterised by an underlying sense of decline and fall, and*

[68] According to Max Weber, researchers can construct ideal types by aligning a series of features characteristic of a particular phenomenon, such as state bureaucracies, political parties and ideologies, or styles of political sovereignty. These sets of characteristics, drawn from multiple examples, can be used to build an abstract or utopian model, an 'ideal type'. Though researchers should never expect to find the ideal or utopian variant of their model when studying a historical reality empirically via their sources, they can use such abstract models as heuristic guides to aid attempts to map the complexities of historical reality. In this way, researchers consciously engage with both nomothetic patterns and idiographic data, realising these two forms of knowledge possess a synergetic relationship. Regarding critiques that ideal types present an essentialist definition, this is not the spirit in which they are being deployed by this study. Rather, the model of modernism offered here should be seen as 'a' working description of the phenomenon, not 'the' answer to the question of what ultimately constituted modernism. For more on how Max Weber theorised 'ideal types' see: Thomas Burger, *Max Weber's Theory of Concept Formation: History, Laws, and Ideal Types* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976).

engaged with the idea of radically confronting this problem either by lamenting the loss of an earlier world or by reinvesting a seemingly decaying realm with renewed senses of transcendent unity. Counterpointing highly variegated, radical readings of modernity as the fragmentation of society, of civilisation in decline, of reality becoming decentred, and even morally bankrupt, in short, of modernity as decadence, maximal modernists have sought to find ways of developing thought and cultural production that offered counterpoints to mainstream thought. These have been based on senses of escape from culturally hegemonic perceptions of social reality perceived as progressive, identified with the decadent mindset by maximal modernists. This could be achieved either by revealing to fellow intellectual groups the extent of the decadence of modernity, developing a new sense of spirituality, or presenting an alternate modernity, based on a new world and a new shared culture. The latter would not only embrace technological aspects of modernity, but would also seek to re-root these traits through the development of renewed senses of the transcendent and the mythic. The aim of such revitalised senses of reality was to metamorphosis the chaotic, anomic *qualities of modernity into a new sense of higher order. This desire for forms of cultural rebirth is the palingenetic quality of maximal modernist thought and cultural production. Often, this trend was articulated in a mood of what might be called visionary pessimism, namely that only by demonstrating that one is fully aware of the sense of despair generated by modernity's decadence can one achieve thought that authentically offered a renovated poetic sense of* kairos *emerging from the anomic* chronos *of modernity, and consequently was capable of talking seriously of an ultimately hopeful sense of renewal. Cultural palingenesis, or rebirth, may have been articulated in the form of a new 'organic' ideology offering a new mode of politics, a novel aesthetic style capable of transforming modernity's evils into new beauty, or simply through cultural production that offered a sense of temporary shelter, a fleeting sense of the transcendent, as an escape from modernity's contrary nature, potentially expressed through admixtures of mystical, religious and / or philosophical registers.*

Far from merely a literary or artistic category, then, maximal modernism may be articulated in a range of cultural fields, and, as with the earlier discussion on categories of culture, one can apply adjectives in order to offer heuristic distinctions between particular aspects of cultural production through which a modernist tone is being articulated. For example: political modernism located a sense of decadence within hegemonic political ideologies and offered a vision for a new political order emerging from a revolutionary moment (Marxism is a typical instance of this type of modernism); religious modernism offered a new sense of the sacred, often fusing aspects of established religions with novel methods for expressing a religious temperament, one specifically tuned to imbuing

modernity with a spiritual quality (we will see this later with H. G. Wells' ideas of a new God and a new religion); aesthetic modernism sought to reinvent artistic styles in literature, poetry, the visual arts, and so forth, offering cultural production expressing the fragmentation of reality, the breakdown of received values, the lack of autonomy, and the passivity of the self in a dynamic society (T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf are key figures here, as Sherry has extensively documented); and philosophical modernism sought to diagnose a sense of crisis within western thought and present radical new modes of thinking that rejected the western canon and attempted to create a sense of rupture with traditional modes of thought (here, Nietzsche is an exemplary figure).

Maximal modernism, then, is the generic term for analysing radical cultural and intellectual confrontations with a decadent modernity. Most importantly, it does not signify all responses to modernity, only those which regard the modern world as manifesting forms of elemental decline. In sum, maximal modernists do not view modernity as progress and do not believe in trouble-free continuities between past, present and future. Rather, unlike many more moderate engagements with modernity, maximal modernists emphasise discontinuity between past, present and future, highlight a sense of deep-seated crisis of modernity in the present, and can even programmatically develop radical means to resolving this crisis. Finally, it is important to recognise that this paradigm is designed to help analyse a diverse intellectual history, rather than directly aiding literary and artistic criticism. Therefore, unlike other usages of the term 'modernism', 'maximal modernism' is primarily a heuristic tool for historians of ideas to compare, contrast and contextualise the intellectual history of modernity.

Nascent maximal modernist tendencies in prewar Britain

As we have seen, European thought by the turn of the century was characterised by a deep-seated ambivalence, and tropes of confidence and consternation regarding the future of the west abounded in equal measure. The British were no strangers to this trend, and responding to the mood of modernity as ambivalence, in the years before the war various forms of cultural production and thinking emphasising discontinuity and change were developed in many areas of the country's cultural dynamics. In literature and the arts, both Wyndham

Lewis' Vorticists and the American émigré Ezra Pound's Imagists developed aesthetic modernisms, while the Slade School of Art incorporated the still novel Impressionism in its syllabus. Less radically, the popular Georgian Poetry movement was scandalising the conservative aesthetic tastes of the era, again contributing to a sense of changing standards and norms.[69] In politics and economics, intellectuals such as the Fabians and other, more radical, thinkers set out key problems facing the changing world. These radicals included Hillaire Belloc, who offered an alternate modernity via his theory of Distributism, while another escape from capitalist modernity was presented by the guild socialist movement. Further, especially through his concept of the 'life-force', George Bernard Shaw had helped to disseminate the far-reaching ideals of continental figures such as Wagner, Ibsen and Nietzsche. Indeed, regarding the emergence of modernist philosophy, British intellectuals such as Orage and Oscar Levy were key disseminators of Nietzsche's ideas, while Bergson was propagated by T. E. Hulme. Drawing on the ideas of Francis Galton, Edwardian eugenicists began to develop their publicism promoting the regeneration of the national race as a means to combat fears of degeneration. Meanwhile, Wells filled the public's ideas of the future with visions of technologically-advanced vision for British and world civilisation. Aside from these trends of cultural rupture and renewal manifest within the country's intelligentsia, from around 1910 a mood of ambivalence regarding the country's orderly and progressive march into the future was also augmented by political unrest in Ireland, the cluster of issues surrounding female suffrage, and increased strike rates combined with the threat of syndicalism.

To generalise, then, a sense of consternation peppered many British intellectuals' expectations of the near future by the second decade of the twentieth century, and diverse forms of maximal modernism developed within this culture of ambivalence. Epitomising the tone of modernity as ambivalence in 1909, a mood widely abroad in early twentieth century British cultural production, later director of British propaganda and Liberal MP C. F. G. Masterman concluded his *The Condition of England* by arguing that the country was:

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[69] Although far from aesthetic modernists, in terms of offering a revitalised sense of culture, in their historical context the Georgian movement was energised by a sense of cultural renewal. For more details, see: Robert H. Ross, *The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal, 1910 – 22* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), esp. ch.1, "The literary Scene: 1911".

> uncertain whether civilisation is about to blossom into flower, or wither in a tangle of dead leaves and faded gold. We are can find no answer to the enquiry, whether we are about to plunge into a new period of tumult and upheaval, whether we are destined to an infinite promulgation of the present half-lights and shadows, whether, as we sometimes try to anticipate, a door is to be suddenly opened, revealing unimaginable glories.[70]

Masterman was no conventional modernist by any stretch of the imagination, but this diagnosis and sense of anticipation reveals something important about the intellectual milieu immediately before the First World War in Britain. Tropes of confusion regarding deeper meanings of the modern world, alongside acute sensitivity to the changes that rapid modernisation was bringing, combined with nebulous hopes for a new era, could all be detected in prewar British culture, as was the case across Europe.

With the outbreak of the war, this mood of ambivalence regarding the future, manifest in many intellectual discourses in Britain and Europe, was dramatically intensified. Therefore, when the figure at the centre of the war's *casus belli*, Gavrilo Princip, started a chain of events that resulted in the outbreak of European war, what was intended merely as a terrorist suicide mission in the name of an emergent south Slav nationalism led directly to the sacrifice of millions of soldiers on the battlefields of Europe.[71] In the face of this new, apocalyptic, crisis intellectuals across the continent feverishly speculated whether the event would be merely destructive, resulting in an intensification of modernity's decadence, or whether it would represent the birth pangs of the new world, one that many hoped would redeem a decadent era and, as Masterman put it, reveal new 'unimaginable glories'.

Having now completed the methodological framework for this study by outlining a heuristic model for identifying and exploring maximal modernist tendencies within a range of cultural production, not merely aesthetics, we can now turn to our case studies. The first three

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[70] C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: The Shenval Press, 1960) p.234.

[71] For more details on the palingenetic aspect of the ideology that underpinned the assassination, see: Paul Jackson, '"Union or Death!": Gavrilo Princip, Young Bosnia and the role of "sacred time" in the dynamics of nationalist terrorism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol.7/no.1 (2006).

chapters will examine the maximal modernist journal *The New Age*. Firstly, this will take the form of a chapter length case study surveying the responses of its editor, A. R. Orage, to the war, focusing especially on how he prophesised revolution as a result of the collapse of the capitalist system during the conflagration. Having examined Orage's guild socialist publicism, which was primarily concerned with promoting both a cultural and a political revolution during the war, chapters two and three will survey the entire wartime print run of the journal. Chapter two will examine other examples of the revolutionary guild socialist ideology that was highly prevalent in the pages of *The New Age*, and chapter three will then analyse the wide range of non guild socialist maximal modernist thinking that were published in the journal during the war. After examining a range and diversity of maximal modernist tendencies in one of Britain's leading avant-garde journals during the war, chapter four will examine the output of one of the country's most prolific public intellectuals, H. G. Wells. This will draw out his vision for total renewal for the world as a result of the war, highlighting how he envisaged the emergence of a new international order to be organised along socialist principles, following the conflagration. Wells' vision would not only lead the west into a new world that would have eliminated war, but also into one with a social structure that would be gelled together by a radically modernised form of religion. Chapter five will turn our attention to May Sinclair, and will demonstrate how a maximal modernist thread of spiritual renewal ran through her wartime journal, her psychoanalytic writings, her viewpoint defending philosophical idealism, and also her wartime fiction. The final chapter of case studies will survey three war poets not usually included within the compass of modernism, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, and Rupert Brooke. This will move us to figures that are on the fringes of the maximal modernist model – or, in Brooke's case, just beyond it – and will explore the relationship between maximal modernist artistic representation of the conflict and each poet's unique responses to exposure to the front line. As we will see, the biographies and artistic output of each of these figures was predicated on notions of war leading to a new sense of spirituality, and each came to regard the pre-1914 world not only as decadent but also attempted to create cultural production capable of sublimating war experiences into an artistic register. The final chapter will then place within an international context the output of these case studies. It will do this firstly by relating how they conform and diverge from the cluster of tropes highlighted by maximal modernist model, before augmenting the maximal modernist paradigm with concepts drawn from

cultural anthropology. These tools will be used to identify a causal link between the war itself, maximal modernism and a widespread sense of liminality that emerged especially during the interwar era across the continent. This chapter will also argue for the need to engage in further study of the links between British and continental intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century.

From this assorted selection of case studies, this thesis will be able to explore many, highly diverse aspects of British wartime culture. Through an analysis of *The New Age*, we will examine one of the key Little Magazines of the period; Wells offers us the perspective of perhaps the most prominent public intellectuals of the war; May Sinclair allows for a representative examination of the response of feminists to the war; and by analysing Rosenberg, Sassoon and Brooke we will see how the pattern of war as a horrific, yet sometimes redemptive experience, was constructed through the experiences and works of three of Britain's most important war poets, when subjected to the unique pressures of the trenches. Finally, by studying these case studies, the following chapters will demonstrate that, rather than merely conforming to a homogeneous pattern, the identification of maximal modernist responses to the war's crisis came in many, highly diverse forms. The study, then, will not only complete the narrow task of relating the case studies to the model of maximal modernism, but will also offer detailed, original empirical research on the intellectual output of each case study, revealing their fundamental intellectual differences through close analysis. In sum, this combination will offer a truly polysemic cultural history of the war, combining conceptual innovation with original archival study, including extensive textual retrieval.

Chapter 1: A. R. Orage's war, 'it was as if God had taken us at our word and granted our prayer to make all things new'

A. R. Orage was a key figure in the dissemination of maximal modernist cultural production in early twentieth century Britain. Especially significant was his editorship of the avant-garde weekly journal, *The New Age*, from 1907 to 1922, a Little Magazine that vigorously promoted various maximal modernist projects for cultural and spiritual renewal. The aim of this chapter is to draw out how Orage's publicism, articulating especially a form of political modernism, responded to the outbreak of the First World War. For the most part, then, this chapter will focus on how Orage's maximal modernism developed a neo-Marxist ideology, guild socialism, and reacted to wartime developments. Further, as stated in the Introduction, this study will not merely identify cases of maximal modernism, but will actively move beyond simply pigeonholing intellectuals as maximal modernists and explore in some detail their intellectual output. In order to achieve this aim, the following analysis will offer a detailed reconstruction of Orage's responses to the war, re-establishing the nuances of his interpretation of the event's underlying international, revolutionary significance through a wide-ranging, textual retrieval of his commentaries. From this reconstruction of Orage's key ideas, we will be able to see the maximal modernist dynamics of his thought, alongside his idiosyncratic reading of key events. However, before embarking on this analysis, and in order to contextualise these more political opinions in his maximal modernist worldview, it will explore briefly his embrace and synthesis of various trends in modernist culture in the years leading up to the war.

A. R. Orage's revolt against positivism: from Nietzsche to The New Age *and guild socialism*

Originating from a lower middle class background, Orage followed in his father's footsteps and became a schoolmaster in Leeds.[1] Already deeply interested in the philosophy of Plato,

[1] Indeed, Samuel Hynes has noted that Orage was essentially one of a new type of cultural producer, the 'lower-middle-class provincial intellectual' who took his work seriously, was highly susceptible to intellectual conversions, and regarded Victorian notions of science and liberalism as bankrupt. Samuel Hynes, *Edwardian Occasions: Essays on English Writing in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) p.39–

by the 1890s Orage had developed a fascination with new trends of mysticism characteristic of the *fin-de-siècle* era and joined the Theosophical Society.[2] He also attended the Fabian Society while in Leeds, helping to found the Leeds Branch of the ILP, and even wrote for the *Labour Leader* between 1895 and 1897. Further, before moving to London in 1906, Orage created the Leeds Art Club, an institution designed, as Holbrook Jackson put it, to 'reduce Leeds to Nietzscheism', consequently attracting major figures, such as G. B. Shaw and G.K. Chesterton, to the city.[3]

Orage was profoundly influenced by Nietzsche in the Edwardian period. Indeed, at this time he became a key figure in disseminating Nietzsche's philosophical modernism in Britain, and wrote three books on the philosopher. The first of these, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age*, briefly outlined the theses of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, and discussed the idea of the superman. In a pioneering analysis for English audiences of this era, Orage argued that a deep understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy lay at the core of any 'moral regeneration of Europe'[4] – a theme characteristic of maximal modernism according to our model. He highlighted the Nietzschean concept of a dialectic between the forces of fundamental change and creativity, represented by Dionysus, and the forces of continuity and stability symbolised by Apollo. Also, Orage was clear that he was a fellow believer in this dialectic, and was convinced that the former had to triumph out over the latter if the continent was to receive the necessary transvaluation of all values. Meanwhile, in the first extended discussion of *Beyond Good and Evil* in English, Orage highlighted how the moral revaluation that Nietzsche promoted sought the destruction of Christian morality, now a manifestation of a decadent system of values. Indeed, Orage underscored Nietzsche's assertion that entire cultures were either characterised by an

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40. However, in this essay, Hynes fails to establish Orage as part of a new generation within the European intelligentsia, who were seeking to effect a radical transvaluation of the continent's received norms and morality, thereby epitomising the inability to regard British intellectuals within a wider, European perspective. Rather, Orage's variant of modernist thought places him in a wider European community of intellectuals who both rejected modernity as it existed, and proposed radically alternate forms for modern society.

[2] Orage described his outlook as spiritual rather than religious in nature. For him, spirituality promised growth and vitality whereas religion represented a more formalised and therefore pedestrian way of regarding the world. See: Gary Taylor, *Orage and The New Age* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000) p.4.

[3] David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England, 1890 – 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) p.226. For a study exploring the history of Orage's activities whilst based in Leeds, see: Tom Steel, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club, 1893-1923* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990).

[4] A. R. Orage, *Friedrich Nietzsche, the Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (London: no publisher, 1906) p.20.

overarching sense of ascent or decline, and that a state of decadence epitomised early twentieth century Europe.[5]

Contrasting this work, *Consciousness, Animal, Human and Superhuman*, gave clearer expression to Orage's own re-working of Nietzsche's philosophical modernism. Comprising a series of lectures given to the Theosophical Lodges of Manchester and Leeds (later published by the Theosophical Society), the book's thesis talked of three stages of consciousness. The lowest grade was animal consciousness, which was unreflective, not self-aware and largely intuitive, conscious only of interaction with the material realm. Second was human consciousness, which was distinguished by self-awareness; a realisation of one's own ability to think. Therefore, human consciousness was able to build on animal consciousness by developing an awareness of a subjective, 'inner' realm. According to Orage, the problem with human consciousness rested with its dual nature, torn between perceiving both an 'exterior', material world and an 'inner', subjective one, forcing it to relying on the intellect to navigate through an awareness of these very disparate realms. Consequently, human consciousness was an unstable phenomenon, one existing in a state of continual flux and confusion. Finally, the highest stage of consciousness, the superhuman, was characterised not only by the relative sophistication of thought manifest by human consciousness, but transcended it; here the intellect was released of the burden and flux of conscious thinking and thus functioned intuitively. Superhuman consciousness, then, was characterised by a sense of *exstatis* from an everyday mentality. In this higher state of being, consciousness became 'winged' and intuitive. The heightened state of being characteristic of superhuman consciousness was a state partially achieved, for example, in the presence of 'Religion, Art Love Nature, and Great Men', where one feels

> lifted out of our duality into a sphere where for an instant we become one of Plato's spectators of time and existence. At such moments time, space, and existence are indeed felt to be beneath us, outside of us. We are above ourselves, above our human mode of consciousness, freed and released, superconscious. Then the walls of egoity close around us, the ecstasy is past, and we are once more human.[6]

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[5] Here, Orage also explained that the Nietzschian view of the world was, in the final analysis, a mystical one; it was this mysticism which Orage found most common ground with his philosophy – a mysticism that he likened to William Blake, especially in the latter's "Marriage Between Heaven and Hell".

[6] A. R. Orage, *Consciousness: Animal, Human and Superhuman* (London: no publisher, 1907) p.83.

The book concluded with the claim that these glimpses of a 'higher' state of being, snatches of *kairos* outside of normal time, needed to be developed into a coherent science, or to use the language of our model into a form of philosophical modernism.[7]

Shortly after developing these ideas, and in association with Holbrook Jackson and George Bernard Shaw, Orage took over editing *The New Age*. In prewar Britain, the dissemination of a range of new trends in cultural production and thinking was facilitated by numerous publications, such as *The New Witness*, *The Spectator*, *Commentator*, *Saturday Review*, *The New Statesman*, *T. P.'s Weekly*, *The Egoist*, and Wyndham Lewis's abortive *Blast!*.[8] Orage's *The New Age* was soon regarded as one of the more radical of these Little Magazines, carving out a reputation as a leading outlet for avant-garde ideas, broadly conceived. As a result, Orage became a widely respected figure in London's cultural circles, especially for his ability to take new ideas seriously. He considered this work to be pioneering a new style of journalism. Crystallising this point, Orage claimed that there were two styles of publicism, the 'representative' and the 'preventative'. The former 'represented' the common attitudes that were in wide circulation, whereas the latter sought to 'present' fundamentally new points of view. *The New Age* was styled solely as the latter: a journal consciously marketing itself towards the newly emerging British 'intelligentsia'. The journal's maximal modernist remit not only focused on socialism in politics and experimentation in aesthetics, but also hosted some of the earliest literary debates on subjects such as psychoanalysis, eugenics, theosophy

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[7] In his final book on Nietzsche, Orage offered a very a far more detailed analysis of the core ideas of his philosophy. For more on Orage's key role in the introduction of Nietzsche to English audiences, see: Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England*, p.261.

[8] The comparative literature on the Little Magazines is itself in need of an update. The first attempt to survey these publications came in 1946. See: Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946). However, this volume did not discuss *The New Age*. Other contributions to the literature on this subject include: Ian Hamilton, *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, c1976); Wolfgang Görtschacher, *Little Magazine Profiles: The Little Magazines in Great Britain 1939-1993* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1993); and Terry Murphy, *Dissident Culture: The Little Magazine in England, 1894-1941*, (unpublished PhD thesis located at Oxford University, 1991). *The New Age* itself is available online at a site maintained by Brown University: http://dl.lib.brown.edu:8080/exist/mjp/index.xml [last accessed: 19/09/2007]. Recently, the Modernist Magazines Project has been launched, and will undoubtedly enrich the scholarship in this field. Its preliminary output can be found on its website, http://www.cts.dmu.ac.uk/modmags/index.htm [last accessed: 05/12/2007]. This website includes a 'background paper' on Orage and *The New Age*, which argues that Orage manifested a form of "social modernism", yet fails to explain fully what is meant by this term. See: John Wood, 'The Social Modernism of Orage and The *New Age*', http://www.cts.dmu.ac.uk/modmags/left_col/conference_papers/wood_social_modernism_orange_new_age.pdf. [last accessed: 05/12/2007].

and 'new age' spirituality.[9] Frequently, this would produce contradictions in terms of content, resulting in the journal playing host to a series of lively debates between serious 'organic' thinkers – sometimes even encapsulating an entire debate over a particular issue in its pages.[10]

Demonstrating his own highly eclectic range of opinions, Orage began to use the journal as a platform attacking trends towards realism in literature and drama from 1910. Broadly echoing his earlier discussions on the need to access superhuman consciousness, his articles on the arts claimed that the trend towards realism merely offered a pseudo-scientific approach to literature, one that ignored the transcendental goal of connecting with the human soul via literary aesthetics. Orage maintained that literature itself should be devoid of explorations of essentially sociological issues, partisan political statements, and scientific aspects of psychology, although he regarded these as fascinating and necessary topics for factual discussion. In his analysis, the intrusion of such thinking into modern writing epitomised the trend towards realism, and such an approach was regarded as erroneous because it presented literature as ultimately something utilitarian rather than beautiful. In short, art should never concern itself with political or sociological propaganda. Only through such a rejection of realism could such arts again truly focus minds on the human soul, thereby revealing the true profundity and beauty of the human condition to its audience, as had Dante, Shakespeare and Blake. In so doing, what Orage considered truly great literature offered access to a nebulous religious sensibility.[11]

However, Orage's contributions to the journal were not merely restricted to cultural critiques advocating a classical revival in literature. From 1912 until the end of the war, he became a key advocate of the guild socialist variant of neo-Marxism – in his hands, another

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[9] By establishing a distinction between different forms of modernism, it is hoped to avoid the confusion manifest in the chapter on *The New Age* in Ann J. Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880 – 1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) ch.5. Her chapter rightly identifies a divide in the journal between articles articulating avant-garde aesthetics, i.e. aesthetic modernism, and guild socialist politics, i.e. political modernism, but fails to properly demonstrate how both these strands of modernist thought emanated from a similar critique of western civilisation, one that regarded it as having fallen into a state of decadence and therefore in dire need of radical – what this study has dubbed a palingenetic shift – in its underlying values in order to effect societal redemption.

[10] A classic example of this came in early 1908. Firstly, the critique of socialism presented by Hillaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton's was analysed by H. G. Wells in *The New Age*. Following this article, Wells' critique was discussed by Chesterton himself in his article "Why I Am Not A Socialist", also printed in the journal. Following this intervention, the whole 'Chesterbelloc' debate, alongside Wells' own contributions, were criticised by George Bernard Shaw, also in the pages of *The New Age*.

[11] Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) p.109-10.

means to restore a sense of spiritual vitality to modern human existence. According to S. T. Glass, who has offered the most authoritative critical survey of guild socialism, this ideology was predicated on several discrete strands of thought.[12] Central to its underlying vision was the theme of a modernised medieval revival. This trope had been presented by many writers as a means to restore the dignity and status of modern workers throughout the 19th century, including giants such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and especially William Morris. The central conduit linking this medieval influence to the new ideology came via A. J. Penty's vision of a restored version of the guild system, published in his 1906 volume *The Restoration of the Gild System.* Though its reception was initially lukewarm, this book was followed in 1912 by a far more forward-looking presentation of the idea of modernised guilds, now articulated through a clearer vision of a Marxist-style, revolutionary takeover of the means of production by the proletariat. These essays were written by S. G. Hobson in 1912, and published and endorsed by Orage in the pages of *The New Age.* With these articles came a renewed interest in renovated versions of the medieval guild system as a panacea for the problems of modern industrial relations. Penty's ideas were finally augmented with critical discussion, and the new ideology of guild socialism was born. Orage ensured that *The New Age* was central to the guild socialist project, a movement that, in practice, tended to appeal far more to frustrated middle class figures such as Orage himself, rather than directly to the working classes and their political bodies. Indeed, although ideologically opposed to Fabianism – a movement that proposed 'state capitalism' according to guild socialists – guild socialism was not only composed of many ex-Fabians but also took many of Fabianism's methods of reproducing itself. These techniques, such as learned lectures, essays in Little

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[12] For a more complete analysis of guild socialism, see: S. T. Glass, *The Responsible Society: Ten Ideas of the English Guild Socialist* (London: Longman, 1966). There is also a detailed discussion of guild socialism in Tom Villis *Reaction and the Avant-Garde: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006). However, contrary to the argument forwarded by this thesis, Villis characterises guild socialism as a reactionary rather than revolutionary ideology. The case is plausible, and there were certainly socially conservative elements to the guild socialist movement. However, it is argued here that the notion of a reactionary maximal modernism is a somewhat awkward interpretation, if not a contradiction in terms. Therefore, although guild socialism looked to past models to inform its notion of revolutionary action, and possessed many socially conservative attitudes (e.g. antagonism regarding the emancipation of women, the need to pay respect to honour and duty, and so forth) its core belief in the need for an economic revolution that would redeem society from the antinomies of capitalist modernity gave the ideology a clearly futural dynamic: it sought to realise a new future, not a return to the past. This does not preclude a certain reactionary temperament but underlying this was a radical, forward-looking worldview that sought fundamental renewal for western society. Despite this over-emphasis on guild socialism's reactionary characteristics, Villis' work is to be commended for arguing that guild socialism is an important ideology, and that it should be taken seriously as an example of a native form of modernist ideology.

Magazines, and lengthy polemical monographs, were more likely to appeal to intellectual debate that directly to workers.

In 1914, one such publication, *National Guilds: An Enquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out*, edited by Orage, reprinted many of Hobson's essays from *The New Age*. This volume both gave an outline of the guild system and described how a revolutionary moment could be created from the political crisis that would result from a general strike, one backed economically by Trade Union funds. Further, revolutionary guild socialism placed at its core the argument that it alone would be able to re-unite the spiritual consciousness of British society as an 'organic' entity. Under capitalism, the nation was divided into opposing types of citizen, a minority of 'active', capitalist citizens and vast majority of 'passive', proletariat ones. A guild socialist revolution would turn the 'passive' society of a decadent capitalist order – according to guild socialism composed not only of industrial wage earners but also the 'saletariat' of the emergent lower middle classes – into 'active' citizens. Indeed, the new order would truly manifest 'economic democracy', or direct control by the masses over the deployment of the nation's economic resources. These resources would be subdivided into around twenty-two guilds, one for each sector of industry whereby each member would have voting rights. This sea-change in the status of workers would render all citizens of the new order into the fully 'active' and spiritually content community of a guild socialist, alternative modernity. Moreover, unlike the more ambivalent visions of Morris' communism regarding technology, central to the guild socialist vision for the future was an industrialised world, not a direct throwback to life before the Renaissance.

Alongside drawing on the cadences of Morris' embryonic political modernism,[13] clearly this ideology also took some lessons from the radical Marxist critiques of syndicalism that were popular during this period. Indeed, guild socialism was presented by its proponents

[13] Indeed, Glass maintains that '*News from Nowhere* ... might be taken as the vision that guild socialists strove to interpret in a form appropriate to the twentieth century'. He also highlights that the distinctly anti-parliamentary perspective of guild socialism was another characteristic of the ideology that was, in part, lifted from Morris' own contempt for the party system. See: Glass, *The Responsible Society*, p.8. In his study, Glass has also highlighted the importance of the theories of distributivism of Hillaire Belloc on this ideology, especially the critical concept of the 'Servile State'. Finally, Glass emphasises the influence of the theory of 'political pluralism' on guild socialists. One central principle of this school of thinking was that the national society predated the emergence of the modern state, and that a nation was composed of multiple sources of authority within its community, not merely the laws enforced by the modern state. This variant of an organic nationalism, which argued that the nation predated the state, was central to guild socialism. Unlike more internationalist versions of revolutionary socialism, the organisation of people into national groupings would continue after any economic revolution according to guild socialists.

as a middle path between a stateless future and direct workers' ownership of the means of production (as proposed by syndicalism), and the state usurping the role of private capitalists (as proposed by reformist socialists like the Fabians). As Orage's editorial in *The New Age* accompanying Hobson's initial 1912 essays put it: 'Syndicalists ask for the Trade Unions' exclusive management and control; Collectivists ask on behalf of the State for the same autocracy. The working way is to combine these extremes in a joint management by means of which the State shall be in partnership with everybody and everybody in partnership with the State.'[14]

In this later guild socialist phase, Nietzsche's influence on Orage was tempered not only by socialist notions of equality but also the spiritualism of texts such as the *Mahabharata*.[15] Further, after his embrace of guild socialism in 1912, Orage circumnavigated many of the antinomies between his belief in an egalitarian communism and the earlier, profound influence of Nietzsche's elitism by arguing that the latter's thought was riddled with ambiguity. Essentially, Orage claimed that Nietzsche lacked a clear doctrine because he did not live long enough to fully develop one, meaning that his philosophy needed to be synthesised with other ideas in order for his incomplete prophecy of a transvaluation of values to be converted into a coherent and workable system.[16]

Clearly, Orage's thought was a highly idiosyncratic blend of ideas and opinions. Nevertheless, we can categorise this synthesis of philosophies, which included a clear diagnosis of modernity as decadent that was presented alongside a countervailing vision of renewal, maximal modernist. As the following analysis will demonstrate, we can still note traces of this underlying drive to transcend a sense of decadent modernity appropriated from Nietzsche in Orage's war writings but, for the most part, he refracted the war's progress through the lens of an egalitarian political modernist vision for a guild socialist future.

The modern apocalypse and the war: initial reactions and responses

With the outbreak of war, Orage immediately described the international crisis as a scenario from which guild socialism could emerge. Writing somewhere between three and six thousand words each week for the journal during the war period, Orage developed a

[14] *The New Age* vol.10/no.26 (1912), p.604.
[15] Taylor, *Orage and The New Age*, pp.35–6.
[16] Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England*, p.248.

maximal modernist reading of the conflagration that was peppered with articulations of the myth of an immanent revolutionary shift, both in the economic substructure and the more profound 'spiritual' unity of the country. For example, drenched in initial war fever, Orage claimed at the beginning of August 1914 that combat would result in 'a deeper sense of reality than has lately distinguished Europe and a return to spiritual sanities', clearing Europe

> of much cant to her future advantage. We who are alive now may not, it is true, live to see the other side of Armageddon; but another side there surely will be, less black than this for our children and our children's children. Worse things than the war now at our doors the world has never seen; better things than the world has ever known may still come from it.[17]

Continuing this manifestation of war fever, at the end of August 1914 Orage again argued that the war was a turning point in the history of the world, a tragic moment rich with the potential for the new to emerge. Indeed, the war was

> an event without parallel, a catastrophe almost sublime in its significance, a tragedy of almost unimaginable meaning and possibility. Upon its conclusions depends the fate not only of our own Empire, but of all empires ... The world is at the crossroads of history. A turn to the left or the right will determine events for thousands of years to come.[18]

He also repeatedly offered clear assertions that the present now offered 'the most favourable [occasion] for revolutionary thought that ever was in the history of the world'. Indeed, not merely the map of Europe, but the 'the mind of Europe' was 'being recast'. Further, as a result of what he regarded as a transvaluation of hegemonic values, astonishing 'revelations are taking place everywhere and the more of them the better'.[19]

Throughout the war, the underlying rhetorical strategy of these editorials was to present the conflict in terms of heightened nationalism and a sense of profound change. The

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[17] *The New Age*, vol.15/no.14 (1914), p.315.
[18] Ibid., vol.15/no.17 (1914)p.386.
[19] Ibid. vol.16/no.1 (1914), p.2.

idea that a generalised and apocalyptic sense of crisis as well as the prospect of fundamental social and economic renewal went hand-in-hand was self-evident for Orage. 'National feeling runs high', he would argue, at a time 'when everything is in the melting pot, and [when] all the old moulds are broken or breaking'.[20] Significantly, the melting pot metaphor was one frequently employed in Orage's war writings, and was used to articulate his belief that Europe was in a state characterised by fundamental transition and socio-political malleability. 'In the most precise sense of the metaphor', he argued in 1916, 'everything in the nation became fluid. Forms, habits, institutions, customs, prejudices, and all the rest of it were tossed into the cauldron, and there rapidly became molten, and so have remained even to this moment ... it was as if God had taken us at our word and granted our prayer to make all things new.'[21]

Additional to the trope of the nation in fundamental transition, the theme of capitalists failing in their national duty was a recurrent feature of these editorials. To take an example from October 1914, here Orage railed against what he alleged was the capitalists' war – based on the principle of fighting to capture German markets – asserting that, if this were to happen, then Britain would have 'Degenerated a war of ideas into a war for more trade with no good national result', a nefarious consequence 'of listening at this moment to the profiteering braggadocio and yardstick councils of "city man" and his confederates, instead of to the councils of honour and national spirit'.[22] In November 1914, Orage further developed this point, arguing that, unlike the proletariat, the business classes 'have not, except in pursuit of their own personal interests, performed any notable service to the nation'.[23] What such sloganeering revealed was the way in which Orage underpinned his analysis with a stark, binary opposition between the 'good' proletariat, who ultimately symbolised 'higher' spiritual qualities against the 'evil' capitalist who in the final analysis was always presented as the epitome of 'base' materialism and greed. Orage's endorsement of Marxism's class war dichotomy also emphasised its dialectic relationship; capitalists were sewing the seeds of their own destruction during the war. We can get a clear sense of this endorsement of Marxist style historicism from a piece written at the end of 1916, immediately after the formation of the Lloyd George Ministry:

[20] Ibid. vol.18/no.11 (1916), p.244.
[21] Ibid. vol.19/no.5 (1916), p.97-8.
[22] Ibid. vol.15/no.24 (1914), p.561.
[23] Ibid. vol.16/no.3 (1914), p.58.

> And again we may point out – not without a touch of malice – that in propagating the present war and in insisting so loudly upon the necessity of fighting it to a finish, the capitalist parties have really been calling upon a spirit, stronger than their own, and one which they will find hard to lay at their discretion – the spirit of the English working classes, the spirit of the English folk.[24]

Again, here we can see guild socialism's idiosyncratic blend of English nationalism combined with a generic, maximal modernist vision of regeneration. This dialectical revolutionary interpretation will contrast with some of the later case studies of wartime maximal modernism, as we will see.

Because Orage believed that, ultimately, Europe was engaged in a war of ideas, he sometimes argued that intellectuals were partly culpable for its outbreak. After all, they contributed to the culture from which the war emerged, and had especially failed to persuade the Germans that the increasing threat of militarism and threats of dominance would be a regressive step for both Europe and for Germany. In order to comprehend how Orage framed his reading of the conflict as a war over ideas, it is also worth looking at some of the more reflective, philosophical discussions that he published early on in the First World War. Indeed, in some of these early wartime writings, Orage explicitly detailed his view of the war thorough the lens of Nietzsche's philosophy. Demonstrating the influence that Nietzsche retained in Orage's thinking, he argued that Nietzsche had been one of the few 'great men' to emerge within Germany since the Enlightenment. In an early "Unedited Opinion" column,[25] Orage discussed this point in some detail. Emphasising his attempt to re-root European culture by developing a new morality, Orage endorsed Nietzsche's philosophical confrontation with a decadent modernity, describing it as a form of secular Catholicism, characterised as such because it sought to remake Europe into a homogeneous, spiritual and, in his view, rising cultural unit, rather than heterogeneous, amoral, enslaved and decadent society. Orage applauded Nietzsche's desire to return to Europe a sense of 'higher' purpose, his overarching vision for a renovated future. As such, Nietzsche was regarded as a 'good

[24] Ibid. vol. 20/no.7 (1916), p.148.

[25] These columns were unsigned and published sporadically. Essentially, they were written up versions of various discussions Orage had with his contributors on philosophical and political matters of the day.

European' because, like fellow countrymen Beethoven and Goethe – but unlike German militarists and imperialists – his thought offered access to a sense of the transcendent, and he knew how to connect with 'spiritual Europe'. Orage argued that Nietzsche would have hated the martial German ambition to impose a crude, materialist hegemony throughout the continent precisely on account of this programme being devoid of any sense of sacred purpose. Stemming from this reading of Nietzsche's philosophy, and demonstrative of Orage's own desires for Europe to be re-ordered into a new and 'creative' dynamic, he concluded that the war could become a radically modernising event if the victorious powers could so will it. In 're-casting the map of Europe', he argued, 'the concerted [goal of the] Powers should be, not solely to ensure peace in Europe, but to provide the conditions of high European culture in every group [i.e. nation-state] that is formed'.[26] This vital development would ensure that Europe regained its sense of spiritual vitality and, therefore, could once again produce 'great Europeans'. However, these initial assertions of Nietzsche's relevance waned as the war progressed, and Orage's analysis generally drew its guiding principles from the political modernism of guild socialism.

Alongside Nietzsche's philosophical modernism, Orage devoted space to discussing more general ethical issues raised by the war. In outlining these views on the morality of the conflagration, he was clear in asserting that violence could be philosophically justified in wartime. Like many guild socialists, Orage was no pacifist. He argued that the duty of British citizens to fight resided not simply in an obligation to serve the good of the national community, but ultimately rested upon the responsibility to serve the good of the whole world. According to Orage, pacifists failed to realise that, although humans could aspire to perfectibility, it would never be the case that all human societies would do so. Consequently, there would always be people who hated the idea of peace and goodwill. Pacifists had demonstrated themselves to be intellectually naïve with respect to this supposed flaw in the human condition, thereby blinding them to the paradox that the deployment of military force in a defensive capacity against aggressive states was sometimes necessary to maintain peaceable international relations. The pacifist method of pursuing peace by simplistically embracing the absence of force, then, was doomed to failure when confronted by an enemy willing to use real force. For peace to exist at all, enemies of freedom and liberty needed to

[26] *The New Age*, vol.15/no.17 (1914), p.396.

be fought periodically; in such times, reason and persuasion retreated, and violence came to the fore as the only effective response to aggression.[27]

This helps to clarify how Orage rejected liberal notions of warfare being something that could ultimately be eliminated though the steady introduction of reason into collective human existence. Instead, Orage saw the world in far more Nietzschean terms; that is continual struggle and conflict producing inescapable cycles of peace and war. Further, although the rhetoric calling for a war to end wars articulated a noble ideal, as with pacifism, this concept was also finally founded on an unsustainable, degenerate idealism that also evoked the underlying notion of the perfection of mankind. Denying the tragic quality of the human condition for Orage, pacifism and more general visions for the elimination of warfare in the future – like the ideal articulated by Wells – were principles destined to fail. Moreover, they also represented denials of the inescapable reality that warfare was an integral aspect of the human condition.

A Nation in Flux

Turning to Orage's critiques of British society during the war, as we have already seen from editorials written in late 1914, he was highly disparaging towards those whom he felt had capital to spare. Consequently, Orage's wartime writing for *The New Age* attempted to offer a detailed critique of Britain's capitalist economy in total war, framing it as a decadent system, especially when contrasted with a guild socialist new order.

We have already encountered Orage's underlying thesis: the wartime economy was marked by a binary distinction between the 'good' worker and the 'bad' capitalist. From 1914 onwards, Orage called for all citizens with significant assets to share their wealth as a gift to the nation that had provided them with peace, alongside the freedom to profit from the wage system in the years preceding the war. Further, Orage used the issue of war loans ideologically as a way to demonstrate the alleged antithesis between patriotic and capitalist goals. Indeed, Orage made great play of what he regarded as the greed of capitalists increasingly becoming visible in wartime. For example, ever-higher rates of interest on war loans, for him, were irrefutable evidence of capitalism's decadent nature, manifest by placing

[27] Ibid. vol.18/no.26 (1916), p.605.

private interest before that of the nation. He was also critical of the role of the state in financing the war; his critique of the first wartime budget in November 1914 argued that, although the total cost of the war could not be paid through taxation, the bulk of it should be. Meanwhile, his analysis of the first war loan of £350 million not only claimed that it would yield its investors £14 million a year in interest, but also that it would ultimately cost the state in excess of £500 million. For Orage, this financial cost would be borne by the nation as a whole; thus, due to inequities in the taxation system, workers would ultimately pay the bulk of this bill. Indeed, he often suggested, given that the state would have to honour the war loans after the conflict, it would be 'compelled to act the part of official receiver on behalf of a practically bankrupt nation. Thirty-nine out of every forty of us will be in hopeless debt to the remaining fortieth, and the State must be the authority to see that we pay in full.'[28] From this perspective, Orage could regard each war loan as a system consciously styled by the capitalist classes to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.[29] Building on Marxism's critique of capitalism enabled Orage to diagnose modernity as decadence in an economic register. Although this was not an essential aspect of maximal modernism, it was central to Orage's own critique of wartime Britain.

During the war, Orage also became increasingly critical of the role played by finance, rather than simply by capitalists.[30] For example, in January 1915, Orage claimed that City of London financiers had 'subscribed just enough' to fund the first war loan, thereby allowing them to claim that a four per cent interest rate would not be enough to attract future investors to subscribe to subsequent loans. He also stated that, because credit could be given or withheld by financiers, the government should begin to seize credit itself, making his case thus: the 'Chancellor of the Exchequer can commandeer credit, with the authority of the Government and the nation behind him, as easily as any one of Lord Kitchener's representatives can commandeer a horse'.[31] This radical notion of the appropriation of assets, then, became a central point Orage made repeatedly in his wartime editorials, dubbing

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[28] Ibid. vol.17/no.21 (1915), p.489.
[29] Ibid. vol.16/no.4 (1914), pp.81–4.
[30] The growing influence of finance on Orage's thinking is also discussed by Tim Redman, in his analysis of the development of Ezra Pound's economic thought. Demonstrating the importance of the journal's editorials for avant-garde intellectuals attracted to the pages of *The New Age*, Pound's ideas on economics were heavily influenced by the ideas of Orage. For more on this point, see: Tim Redman, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) ch.1.
[31] *The New Age*, vol.16/no.10 (1915), p.235.

the commandeering of capital assets by the state 'the conscription of capital'. Indeed, reflecting his opposition to the policy of conscripting men to the army, Orage often called for conscription of bourgeois capital as a *quid pro quo* for the conscription of proletarian men.

Orage was also critical of how money raised by war loans was being transferred into the wage packets of the working classes. According to his analysis, workers were being 'paid as they have not been paid since the golden age of the proletariat in the fourteenth century'.[32] Yet, this prosperity was founded upon borrowed money: 'as soon as the war is over' these wages 'will fall as the interest demanded by capital rises, with the general effect that the condition of the working classes will be more grievous than it has ever been before'.[33] Extending this point hyperbolically with biblical and Greek metaphors, Orage claimed that the decadence of overspending in the present would result in a descent into 'bankruptcy followed by civil revolution' in the future. Therefore the

> precipice towards which we are hurrying is as plain to be seen as the gulf down which the Gaderene swine hurled themselves. Only the very few, however, appear to have the smallest prescience of the coming events. The rest of the nation, from a first pause in extravagant expenditure, have now decided to throw prudence to the winds, to gorge and guzzle, and to dress themselves as if the war were a banquet at the expense and under the direction of Sardanapalus ... Our council to our readers is, therefore, to save themselves, since nobody else will save them. Let them, at least, being now forewarned, find themselves, when the awakening comes, forearmed as well.[34]

Further, although legally included within the bureaucratic structures of the nation, according to Orage's analysis, strictly speaking, capitalists and financiers were not an authentic aspect of its 'spiritual' community; they were motivated by their own greed, not by an altruistic,

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[32] Ibid. vol.17/no.3 (1915), p.49. Indeed, in his *An Alphabet of Economics* Orage was clear that wages were presently high because demand outstripped supply, yet would be low after the war because 'labourers will be in numbers far exceeding the demand'. A. R. Orage, *An Alphabet of Economics* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1917) p.166–8.

[33] *The New Age* vol.17/no.2 (1915), p.26.

[34] Ibid. vol.18/no.4 (1915), p.73–4.

national sentiment. Once again, we see Orage's unique style of identifying a decadent modernity.

As well as discussions critical of the ostensibly decadent aspects of wartime economics, throughout the war Orage was highly critical of the activities of the state's legislative and executive powers. Early in the war, Orage began to claim that the executive was fundamentally disconnected from the will of the people, thus failing in its democratic task of manifesting their collective will.[35] One key condition of democracy was elections, and Orage repeatedly called for a general election to be held during the war. Because an election would inevitably encourage political opposition, for Orage, this would prevent Britain from becoming a *de facto* dictatorship for want of an alternative government. Moreover, he argued that if the situation on the front line were to deteriorate then a well-deliberated, genuinely competitive election may become impossible at a later date. He even claimed that, if a coalition could be formed, it could go further and create a national parliament, with MPs without party allegiances chosen by the public on the grounds that they were 'the best men available'.[36]

With the fall of Asquith's administration, Orage argued that this government had failed because the Prime Minister had been unable to comprehend that the war was not a conflict merely between national armies, as previous wars had been, but rather something entirely new: a war between the totalities of nations. Initially, Orage regarded Lloyd George's rise to the office of Prime Minister as a positive development. However, once in power, Lloyd George was soon deemed to be ineffectual given the necessary re-organisation for society. Contrary to Orage's predictions at the time of his accession, the new Prime Minister failed to move significantly to the left once in office. By the spring of 1917, moreover, Orage began to detect Lloyd George's desire to carry the coalition government into the interwar era. This aspiration was 'almost a declaration of political war' on the proletariat, in Orage's eyes, and demonstrated that Lloyd George, 'with all his elasticity of principle, is fixed in one respect, namely, in his distrust and misunderstanding of Labour', whose future would be 'gloomy in the extreme' under a peacetime Lloyd George premiership.[37] An interwar coalition would only serve to emasculate and denigrate parliament further in the eyes of the

[35] Ibid. vol.15/no.25 (1914), p.585–6.
[36] Ibid. vol.17/no.7 (1915), p.147.
[37] Ibid. vol.21/no.1 (1917), p.2.

public, he argued. As with so many of his arguments on the era following the war, Orage's editorials sought to project into the future a gloomy vision, implying this decadence could only be prevented by a revolutionary transfer to guild socialism.

The role of politics was always of secondary importance to the economic battle occurring in the workplace in guild socialist thought. Nevertheless, regarding the Labour Party's role in parliament, in Orage's eyes, its great failure during the war was the fact that that its MPs appeared to be intellectually stuck in the past. He claimed not only that Labour MPs failed to effectively criticise bills proposed by other members in the interest of the working classes, but that they lacked revolutionary qualities; for example asserting that their 'views seem to go back to the age of the Christian Socialists, or the Benthamites; or, at the very best, to the early period of the Fabian society'[38] – a cardinal sin from the perspective of his revolutionary political modernism. Indeed, this embrace of piecemeal change over revolution was epitomised, for Orage, by the creation of a Minister for Labour at the end of 1916. Although he was glad that to see the Labour Party playing an instrumental role in the formation of the new government – in his view, the fall of Asquith would have been impossible without Labour, a development meaning 'if we are not mistaken, the definite opening of a new era' – Orage argued that the Labour movement 'must be ready to ... exercise their power even to the extent of forcing the defeat of the present Ministry and taking supreme charge of the nation and the war themselves'.[39] Consequently, the threat was that the new Minister for Labour would advertise both to the British proletariat and to the world in general 'that there not only exists in our midst a class of person different from the classes of active citizens, and needing, therefore, to be specially legislated for; but a class whose permanency is taken for granted, and whose status is fixed for all time'.[40] The new minister, then, was a negative symbol of the adoption of a reformatory position within the Labour movement.

Following the 1918 Representation of the People Act, Orage called upon the Labour Party to defer ambitions of becoming the next government; rather, it should actively prepare to become the official opposition. He argued that a stint in official opposition could teach the party to again operate in its own interests, and would prevent it acting as a muddled

[38] Ibid., vol.16/no.17 (1915), p.442.
[39] Ibid., vol.20/no.7 (1916), p.147.
[40] Ibid., p.147.

puppet of capitalism, as it had become under Lloyd George's coalition government.[41] Indeed, by the summer of 1918 Orage predicted that the now inevitable Lloyd George victory would result thus: '[the] historic parties of Conservatism and Liberalism will find themselves broken up irredeemably and their fragments, after the bulk has been absorbed by the Government party, left to dissolve into personal groups'.[42] In character, however, the dynamic of the interwar Parliament would be 'more spirited and adventurous than we have known it to be for many years', and that 'it will need to be so if we are to survive the remaining period of the war and the opening phases of the reconstructive period'. Orage was unambiguous regarding the central responsibility of the electorate too, and was clear that their duty was primarily to return able politicians, not a particular party: 'The electors have the future in their hands, the future of a century. The absence of party alignments makes it possible for them to elect whom they will, regardless of everything but the character and intelligence of their candidate.'[43] In October of 1918, he was even more assertive on this point:

> The sickness of the world is not a passing malady to be redeemed by a temporary change of diet; it is radical and profound; and its symptoms are indicative of a need of nothing less than a transformation of world-regimentation and policy... The blood of our slain is on the hands of our electorate, to be redeemed by a new world, shaped by good men, or left to corrupt and to cry to heaven for our destruction as a faithless generation.[44]

By the end of the war, at least in part, Orage placed his hope for the emergence of fundamental change in the fragmentation of prewar party politics. However, as economic direct action was central to theories of guild socialist revolutionary praxis, it is important to discuss how he regarded labour relations during the war.

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[41] Ibid. vol.23/no.11 (1918), p.163; and ibid. vol.23/no.15 (1918), p.230.
[42] Ibid. vol.23/no.18 (1918), p.279.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid. vol.23/no.24 (1918), p.375.

Revolution in the workplace?

Extending this articulation of a maximal modernist thesis which promoted an economic revolution in wartime labour relations, Orage's guild socialism argued that the impetus for the redemption of British society needed to emerge primarily from organised labour. Indeed, Orage wanted the labour movement to become far more involved in the management of the economy, argued for the nationalisation of key industries, especially shipping, and ultimately wanted it to take over the economic organisation of the country through the establishment of the proposed series of National Guilds. In terms of the underlying mood for change, Orage's hope was that, during the war, the labour movement would be able to raise a widespread sense of national betrayal and injustice in the working classes – an attitude that would result in workers becoming disillusioned with capitalism, thereby curbing their patriotic zeal. Ultimately, this would result in a significant decline in productivity, and the downturn would be blamed on capitalist economics, forcing the government to consider the necessity of the transfer to a different economic system – guild socialism – which was capable of drawing out genuine patriotic fervour among workers.

As we have seen, the overarching tone of Orage's critiques of organised Labour was to belittle it for shoring up capitalism rather than fomenting revolution. Counterpointing this attitude, one of Orage's most programmatic statements on the way forward for organised labour came in September 1916. Here, he outlined seven key points that were necessary for a war against capital to be successful:

> One: it is necessary that the Labour movement should create for itself a permanent General Staff, the nucleus of which is the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress. Two: the single front of Labour is the union of all the societies, leagues, parties and Trade Unions into which the thousand and one Allies are now divided. Three: the objective of Labour is the control of Capital – the plan of Capital being the control of Labour. Four: every operation of reform that does not aim at acquiring or enlarging the control of Labour over Capital is regimental indiscipline; at best it is a waste of energy, at worst it is treachery or mutiny. Five: the most effective power of Labour is the power to strike. Six: the means to power are the abolition of

the blackleg and the federation of the unions by industries. Seven: the war of Labour for the control of Capital is such a war that victory would herald a new era.[45]

Especially relevant here is how this radical and confrontational statement sketched out a revolutionary change for the near future. In so doing, it framed all industrial action in terms of a wider dialectic between oppression and liberation: point four placed the sense of piecemeal change as an enemy of the revolutionary cause; point five emphasised that economic action took precedence over political representation as the ultimate strategy for organised Labour to renegotiate its relationship within the capitalist system; and point seven reinforced the political modernist message – namely, that Orage's ideology was primarily concerned with the emergence of a new era and a fundamental break with the past.

From such posturing, we can more clearly see that Orage's critique of organised Labour also rested on the argument that the labour movement placed too heavy an emphasis on parliamentary politics, resulting in a leadership detached from the primary concerns of the movement. Like fellow guild socialists, Orage believed that the real power of organised labour centred on the ways in which it could affect the economic processes from the workshops and via union power. Indeed, it was the unions who were 'the governing bodies of labour'; therefore, 'as the cadres of the coming industrial system, they are only second in national importance to the State bureaucracy itself'.[46] By failing to develop economic leverage through industrial action, and instead deciding to play a political game of compromise, Orage conceived unions to be acting as the 'watch-dogs of parliamentary Capitalism rather than the leaders of economic Labour'.[47] Therefore, the TUC abandoning the will to strike, he asserted, was 'not the first step, but the last step, towards the Servile State'.[48] Orage was also unsympathetic to organisations that he felt sought to usurp the leadership of the TUC. Although the Labour movement was akin to 'a creature of vast body and many tails, but without a head' – and although the TUC itself was something of a *'roi fainéant'* in his estimation – it was the duty of the labour movement to compel the TUC to

[45] Ibid. vol.19/no.19 (1916), p.435.
[46] Ibid. vol.17/no.10 (1915), p.218.
[47] Ibid. vol.20/no.1 (1916), p.1.
[48] Ibid., p.4.

work for the interests of economic revolution.[49] Indeed, *An Alphabet of Economics* clarified the historicist argument which claimed not merely that 'a Trade Union is a rudimentary organ for the takeover of Capitalism', but that their 'mission to destroy the wage-system is, we may say, independent of their realisation of it'.[50]

The Munitions Act brought further incursions into workers' rights, Orage lamented in the summer of 1915. One of the most mendacious aspects of this Act, for Orage, was the promise to restore the rights of workers to 1914 arrangements after the war. He regarded this as nothing less than a conscious act of deceit by the capitalist system, seizing on the contingency of wartime conditions to destroy gains made by the labour movement over the preceding half century or so. Orage railed: 'An earthquake does not pass like a cyclone and leave the foundations untouched. For good or for ill, the war has involved society in a social revolution the consequences of which will continue long after the war has become history.' Further, the 'promise to restore the Trade Unions in their complete pre-war privileges' was 'as futile as to promise to set Humpty Dumpty on his wall again'.[51]

When we look more closely at Orage's commentaries on wartime industrial action, we find that he was keen for strikes to occur, but only if they held truly revolutionary potential. Orage's thesis claimed that striking for piecemeal reforms – such as improvement in working conditions or increased wages – actually harmed revolutionary prospects. However, strikes that more generally sought an increase in the economic power and status of the working classes were welcomed. When discussing the strike on the Clyde in early 1915, for instance, Orage was clear that a deeper significance than mere materialism ultimately motivated these actions – even if most strikers were not fully conscious of this fact. Therefore, intellectuals needed to raise public consciousness of this wider historicism: 'in the case of industrial unrest we must learn to look at ourselves, and teach the workman to look, for a profounder origin than the desire for better wages'.[52] Although not all strikers had the necessary revolutionary consciousness, certain strikes at least were, ultimately, manifestations of a moral and spiritual battle underpinning the guild socialist historicism that, according to Orage, promoted a political modernist revolution.

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[49] Ibid. vol.19/no.21 (1916), p.481.
[50] Orage, *An Alphabet of Economics*, p.153–5.
[51] *The New Age*, vol.17/no.8 (1915), p.171.
[52] Ibid. vol.16/no.16 (1915), p.498.

Orage's warnings against wage strikes were unremitting. More to the point, only industrial action that was prepared to create a new world was legitimate in his eyes. He repeatedly took the same position:

> The world, and our nation in particular, will not emerge unchanged after the Great War. Power, organisation, responsibility – these watchwords will take the place of the old Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. We are in for a reconstructive epoch ... the only certain thing is that power and responsibility will alone be the builders of it ... Real power or illusory higher wages are the alternatives before them. Every wage-strike to-day is a waste of energy when it is not something worse.[53]

Capitalism's hegemonic ideology, then, framed workers who were acting in their own class interests as nefarious, unpatriotic figures due to their legitimate pursuit of wartime industrial action. When these grievances stretched even patriotic workers to breaking point and strikes ensued, Orage claimed the employers called in 'their journalistic dogs to hound the strikers to death', which lead to wild accusations such as a lack of patriotism and even secret alliances with Germany.[54] Indeed, Orage was often critical of the press' power, viewing their output simply as the mouthpiece of capitalist hegemony. Countering such media assertions, Orage defended many wartime strikes, claiming that it was simply common sense that 'profiteering in war-goods is vile', asking what 'must it be for the intelligent workmen whose labour is forced to become an accessory in it?' For such workmen, he continued, the moral strain 'must be a torture of the benches as great as the torture of the trenches'.[55]

In further contrasting soldiers and workers, Orage argued that army life offered an ability to demonstrate love for the nation more authentically – namely on the battlefield. Likewise, although they were infused with the same patriotic spirit – especially evident since 1914 – industrial workers could only demonstrate their nationalistic verve through contributing to wartime productivity. Thus, as a result of the dominance of the private interests of capitalism, especially regarding their supposed immoral profiteering during the

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[53] Ibid. vol.17/no.18 (1915), p.418.
[54] Ibid. vol. 18/no.22 (1916), p.505.
[55] Ibid. vol.18/no.23 (1916), p.529.

war, the effects of proletarian patriotic verve were heavily diluted, meaning that their labour in the war effort was 'only secondarily, if at all, in the national service'. Indeed, the war had revealed the distinction between true national service, offered by the army, with the lack of patriotism shown by capitalists.[56] Here was further evidence of the need to switch to guild socialism. The new economic system would allow workers to contribute directly to the nation, without their efforts being filtered through the private interests of capitalists first.

By the spring of 1918, Orage no longer placed his hopes on the emergence of guild socialism as the logical option in wartime. As with other guild socialist ideologues, towards the end of the war, he hoped the Whitley Councils[57] – which allowed workers' representatives and employers to meet and discuss industrial relations – would lead to a fundamental change in the capitalist-worker hierarchy. Further, he also believed that the radical shop stewards' movement could effect fundamental change in the comportment of organised Labour. As with other guild socialists, Orage tried to encourage them to join the movement. Indeed, we will see clearer articulations of the relevance of Whitley Councils and especially shop stewards in the guild socialist publicism surveyed in the next chapter.

By 1918, Orage's ire at the lack of impact regarding the reception of his guild socialist ideas on the war's revolutionary significance within the Labour movement was palpable. Labour organs such as *The Herald*, *The Call*, and *The Labour Leader* were criticised for calling for peace without realising that an end to the war was meaningless unless German militarism was destroyed. He also repeatedly argued that the lack of a vision for a truly regenerated future was the foremost problem amongst leading lights in the Labour movement. For example:

> What is wanted to quicken the languishing atmosphere of Labour is the vision of a new world: a world not made in the image of Mr. Sidney Webb and his Fabian pigeon-holes, still less a world made in the likeness of a city-office. The prospect, on the other hand, of a world organised, responsible and national industries self-

[56] Ibid. vol.16/no.16 (1915), p.499.

[57] The 'Whitley Councils' were created following the Whitley Report and sought to improve the relationship between employers and employees, both during the war and after. For more see: Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: MacMillan, 1975) pp. 84 – 5; and for a summary of the aims of the report, see: *Industrial Councils: The Recommendations of the Whitley Report* (No location: no publisher, no date). This report is available in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

governed by their members would be a fitting and seductive sequel to the most agonising war that has ever been fought.[58]

Regarding the proposed economic revolution in Britain, then, the sphere of industrial relations frustrated Orage greatly. Clearly, he did not regard the labour movement as successful in adopting a revolutionary stance capable of capturing, focusing and directing the need and desire for revolution among the proletariat during the war. However, as we will see in the following chapter, the pessimistic tone of Orage's articles by the war's close was not typical of guild socialist ideologues' reading of the same event in creating revolutionary conditions for the future.

The international 'Melting Pot'

Turning to the ways in which Orage refracted the war's international context through his ideological lens, again we find that he analysed the war in terms of the potential destruction of one world, alongside the creation of another one. We can begin to understand how he conceived the origins of the war through a series of "Unedited Opinions" from 1916. Beginning with the role of Germany as a state rising in political and economic power in the late nineteenth century, Orage concluded that it was inevitable that Germany would want to enlarge its sphere of influence and augment its power. One option was to expand territorially, which explained the enlargement of its Navy and Army, alongside the general development of militarism. However, this had resulted in European powers becoming increasingly wary of German aggrandisement. Nevertheless, many Germans felt the country had a right to pursue some sort of expansion. Conflating these tensions within Germany were concerns that trends embracing economic protectionism among other European powers had prevented it from trading fairly in international markets, thereby stymieing the country's potential economic, as well as territorial, growth. As a means to overcome these difficulties, Orage believed that Germany wanted to expand its sphere of influence in the Middle East, and seized upon the idea of the Baghdad railway as the means for future economic development; and in so doing became reliant upon Austro-Hungary to maintain the peace in the Balkans. From this interpretation, he argued that when Austro-Hungary

[58] *The New Age*, vol.22/no.15 (1918), p.282.

confronted the Russian backed Serbian threat, Germany foolishly took a gamble and began a European war, hoping that the British would not intervene. Ultimately, then, the hubris of German capitalism, especially regarding the need to find foreign lands for investment, had led to the war.[59]

Turning to France, in the face of German aggression, its case was perhaps the starkest. Orage concluded that, for the French 'the war spells spiritual annihilation or spiritual resurrection'.[60] He proposed that, although a popular motive among the masses, the war actually offered the country the opportunity to resolve a conflict with deeper roots than simply revenge for defeat in 1870 and the return of Alsace-Lorraine. The real war between Germany and France was one for cultural and intellectual hegemony over Europe. Orage claimed that, after the revolutions of 1848, Germany had set herself in opposition to French culture and her efforts to develop liberalism. From 1870, Germany found herself successful in creating an alternate cultural and political project that threatened the innate need of the French to demonstrate leadership in this field. Defeat in the Franco-Prussian war and the Alsace-Lorraine question merely added insult to this deeper injury. Victory in the current war would create a revolutionary shift in this trend, resulting in France re-establishing its place as the leader of 'civilised' Europe. Defeat for the culturally, as well as militarily, aggrandising Germany could well finish the country off. For Orage, the French were fighting a culturally defined war for their national *raison d'être*, an existential conflict at the core of the nation's identity.

In contrast to this cultural battle, Russia had the most to gain materially, according to Orage. Arguing that the country was effectively landlocked for most of the year – Archangel was frozen for 6 months, Sweden and Denmark restricted access to the Baltic, Vladivostok was too remote for trade, and Turkey controlled access to the Black Sea – Orage foresaw a revolution in Russian trading prospects if the country could remove some of these blocks through war, thereby transforming ways in which Russia could exploit its enormous natural resources. Because of these economic forces, alongside the underlying weakness of the Tzar, Orage somewhat portentously predicated in 1916 the European war made possible 'a constitutional revolution in Russia even before the war is over'.[61] Yet in this analysis, the

[59] Ibid. vol.18/no.19 (1916), p.438–9.
[60] Ibid. vol.18/no.22 (1916), p. 510.
[61] Ibid. vol.18/no.23 (1916), p.535.

future of international trade both for Russia and for Germany rested upon the control of Constantinople, thereby making Turkey a central country in the geopolitics of the conflict. Despite its allegiance to Germany, one of the great losers in a German victory would ultimately be Turkey, according to Orage's view. Keen to secure trade interests in the Middle East by gaining unfettered access through Turkey, Orage believed that a victorious Germany would not feel the need to respect the sovereignty of Turkey for very long, although the Turks had apparently failed to realise this fact. The only explanation for Turkey refusing to accept Allied assurances of neutrality, Orage concluded, was the delusion that, by joining the Central Powers, Turkey would become an vital regional player in Germany's capitalist economic expansion into the Middle East.

In another of his "Unedited Opinions" in 1916, we get a clearer idea of Orage's own views on the essential conditions for peace with Germany. Importantly, he outlined the necessity for the Allies to force Germany to undergo constitutional revolution that would destroy the 'militarist hegemony of Prussia', thereby heralding a new dawn of socialist-style economic and political democracy. Indicative of his attitude towards the future of Germany, Orage concluded by arguing against a simplistic, punitive approach towards the potential new Germany by the Allies, claiming that, by destroying the old regime, all necessary disciplinary measures would have already been taken. Further, discussing the creation of a democratic Germany allowed Orage to fuse foreign and domestic concepts of revolution. In order to 'bring about a constitutional revolution in Germany', he argued, 'the Allies must be prepared to accept an economic revolution in their own lands'.[62] His publicism, which argued for socio-political transcendence to a new economic order, clearly synthesised events occurring abroad with the argument for revolution at home.

In order to articulate key distinctions between general approaches to the war's international dynamic, Orage developed an idiosyncratic set of categories for discussing international relations in terms of the guild socialist economic revolution. Firstly, Orage believed that in all countries there were two camps of 'imperialists' operating on the political right. Further to the left of the political the spectrum, there were two further categories of politics, 'liberal' and 'democratic'. Thus, the two schools of imperialists consisted of the extreme school, which would show no pity to the defeated nation. Allied extreme

[62] Ibid. vol.18/no.21 (1916), p.485–6.

imperialists, for example, simply desired to 'skin the Germans alive', in Orage's view; German militarists were marked by a similar temper regarding the destruction of British imperial and economic hegemony. Less radically, the more moderate Allied imperialists merely sought to introduce various restrictions on the German military system that collectively would be capable of preventing the country from ever being able to wage war again.

In contrast to the imperialists, liberals and democrats were characterised by their strong opposition to inflicting lasting penalties on the future German state, and instead sought its destruction and renewal via a new constitution. However, their thinking differed on how this end could be realised. According to Orage, liberals sought to achieve a resolution through a negotiated peace, revealing a fatal tendency which believed compromise with militarism was possible. Consequently, liberals saw their primary wartime duty as developing schemas to promote a mutually acceptable end to the hostilities. The democrats, however, believed that peace terms could not be negotiated until the opposing imperialism had been totally defeated militarily, thereby paving the way for the emergence of democracy through economic revolution. Indeed, Orage contended that he was a democrat in every sense, and argued that the solution to the 'German question' that would result in the greatest chance for the freedom for democracy to develop was the only logical way to proceed if a working and stable democratic state was to be formed in Germany after the war.[63] Failure to install working democracy in Germany would result in a decadent, 'patched-up' peace leading to a 'permanent militarisation of Europe'. For Orage, this meant 'the retention permanently, in more or less their present form, of measures of conscription, protection, the censorship, espionage, registration, [and] compulsory arbitration'.[64] In other words, the rights and freedoms of the individual would be severely hampered by the enlarged powers of the state should a 'patched-up' peace come to pass. Of course, for Orage, the term 'democracy' ultimately signified not only political democracy but also economic democracy which, in the final analysis, found its most effective expression in guild socialism. Orage, therefore, believed from the outset of the war that a revolution in German politics was required in order to create lasting peace in Europe. For this revolution to occur, the German proletariat

[63] Ibid. vol.21/no.21 (1917), p.438.
[64] Ibid. vol.22/no.3 (1917), p.42.

needed to be dissuaded of Germany's militaristic case for war, and had to view the event as an act of domestic imperialism contrary to their class interests.

Illustrating his 'democratic' perspective, Orage dismissed the allegations – presented by many in Britain – that there was no essential difference between the German people and their leaders. For example, he asserted that strikes in Germany in 1918 could mark the beginning of a revolution, and demonstrated that Germans were 'potentially if not actually more deeply divided than the people and rulers of any other nation'.[65] A week later, he clarified his position regarding the German people, asserting that the war was not a battle between Germany and Britain *per se*: 'What the democrats in both countries ought to realise is that the conflict is not between the democracies, but between the imperialisms of Germany and the Allies; and, moreover, that of these two opposing imperialisms, it is the German that is the real aggressor'.[66] Therefore, it was vital for revolutionary intellectuals like himself to reveal this sense of a fracturing imperialist hegemony during the war. From such nuances, we can also see that, on the one hand, Orage claimed that the political avant-garde who were interested in economic revolution should unite internationally against their true enemies, the imperialists; yet on the other, he retained a sense of national superiority that ethically justified the Allies' prosecution of the war.

In the summer of 1918, and with the pressure on the Western Front mounting for the Allies, Orage welcomed the re-emergence of the Spartacus movement under Franz Mehring. However, it is worth emphasising that his support for the movement was not because the far-left radicalism of that group chimed with Orage's own thinking, but was due to his hope that the Spartacists would make the distinction between the Majority and the Minority socialist parties look somewhat insignificant, thus causing them to reunite. This development would augment the power and authority of the Social Democrats in this analysis, thereby strengthening the 'definitely democratic' party with whom the Allies would negotiate peace terms.[67] With the fortunes of the Allies turning for the better in the summer of 1918, Orage became even more hopeful for a democratic solution to Germany's future. In August, he claimed that the task of Allied propaganda was to present the potential for a democratic redemption for the German people, and to 'see the German people not as they

[65] Ibid. vol.22/no.15 (1918), p.281.
[66] Ibid. vol.22/no.16 (1918), p.301.
[67] Ibid. vol.23/no.13 (1918), p.194.

appear, or even as they are, but as they may become'.[68] After the war's end, he renewed his claims that the initiative for a move to an 'economically democratic' future for the world lay with a new German constitution itself designed to set an example to other countries. That country had become 'the first orderly Socialist commonwealth in the world', whereas the British were 'more than ever bond-slaves to the capitalist and military oligarchy which now feels itself secure beyond its dreams'.[69]

Turning from Germany to the entry of America into the war – and especially Wilsonian politics – Orage believed that America's intervention in April 1917 was not motivated by simply materialistic impulses, but rather a utopianism justified simply because 'the times require it'. Orage noted that three 'of the mightiest political events ever known in the history of the world have occurred within three years'; further, alongside the outbreak of the war itself and February Revolution in Russia, American intervention was a turning point of such a magnitude that it carried 'with it such implications that our remotest descendents will date an epoch of history from it'.[70] Orage often argued that the diplomacy of Woodrow Wilson, and the rising significance of America on the international stage in general, marked the end of the old Vienna system of international relations. Further, Wilson's 'democratic' mixture of force and reason on the international stage was to be celebrated. Orage also claimed that, unlike 'our own pacifists, if President Wilson has a speech in one hand, he has a sword in the other. Unlike our Imperialists, if he has a sword in one hand, he has a speech in the other ... Such an attitude is the reconciliation of force and diplomacy of which we have spoken.'[71] The intervention of America, then, symbolised again a profound sense of change in world affairs, offering fresh hope for a new political reality to emerge from the war.

Regarding the final 'mighty' political event, responding to the February Revolution in Russia, Orage praised the fact that the country now enjoyed fresh liberties. With each war Russia fought in, he continued, the nation made great socio-political advances, citing the emancipation of the Serfs after the Crimean war alongside the creation of the Duma after the Russo-Japanese war as the precedents of this trend. 'The Russian Revolution', he

[68] Ibid. vol.23/no.16 (1918), p.245.
[69] Ibid. vol.25/no.11 (1919), p.173.
[70] Ibid. vol.20/no.24 (1917), p.554.
[71] Ibid. vol.22/no.17 (1918), p.323.

proclaimed, 'even if it should now experience the dangers of reaction and counter-revolution ... will stand to all time as an act of the greatest popular heroism'. However, he also warned that Russia had now entered into a capitalist era, which would 'only lay bare the economic facts, and, in all probability, enlarge them'.[72] Orage continued by stating that the event would have international reverberations, not only serving as a lesson to Germany that the Allies were serious in overthrowing tyrannical and archaic forms of governance, but also inspiring radicals in the Allied countries to overthrow the capitalist system. Following the February Revolution, Orage consistently appealed for stability in Russia. Defining a revolution as 'a powerful movement Leftwards towards the extremist limits of idealist thought', he called for those fomenting further change to 'stop and rather coerce the diminishing minority of ultra-Revolutionists than apply coercion to the increasing minority of moderate Revolutionists'.[73] This shift leftwards, in relative terms, shunted Britain firmly to the political right among the Allies, he emphasised. To counter this, Orage stated that it was necessary for Britain to move 'in harmony with the general tendency of the whole of the Alliance' to the left if 'our new status will be one of increased strength and Russia will remain our ally with more heart than she has ever had before'.[74] The February Revolution, then, was an event that inspired revolutionary praxis internationally, according to Orage.

Yet support for change in Russian politics evaporated after the October Revolution, and Orage talked far less about the country's affairs than previously. When he raised the issue in November 1917, Orage claimed that the advances made by Lenin and Trotsky were regrettable, and came about as a result of Kerensky's failure to keep the Soviets on side. This was the result of the coalition government in Russia attempting to include the older Russian parties as well as the Soviets. 'Better by far', he stated, 'would it have been if Kerensky and the rest had stuck by the Soviet and refused to share responsibility with the older parties'. This would have 'ensured a moderation in that body [i.e. the Soviets] very different from the acephalous anarchy that now prevails'.[75] By January 1918, he was clear that a Bolshevist dictatorship in Russia was a negative development, especially as it had left the remaining Allies 'in the lurch' by negotiating a separate peace with the central powers.[76] The surrender

[72] Ibid. vol.20/no.21 (1917), p.481.
[73] Ibid. vol.20/no.22 (1917), p.506.
[74] Ibid. vol.21/no.3 (1917), p.50.
[75] Ibid. vol.22/no.3 (1917), p.43.
[76] Ibid. vol.22/no.10 (1918), p.182–3.

of Russia was clearly a great advantage to German continental hegemony, and it was the blinkered idealism of the political modernism being pursued by the Russian far-left that was to blame, according to Orage:

> Russia's "blunder" lay in believing that a purely moral attitude would of itself induce a responsive moral revolution in Germany. With tragic idealism, Messrs. Lenin and Trotsky determined to stake everything upon their noble throw; and they have lost ... If Russian idealism has failed to induce a response in Germany, can we expect that idealism alone in any other nation can succeed?[77]

The presence of a future military threat from Germany appeared to be lost on both the leaders of the revolution and the people of Russia, Orage suggested in April 1918. 'There seems to be no time-sense', among the radicals, 'in Russia that can foresee the situation in which she stands'. The likes of Trotsky and Lenin failed to look into the future, and instead 'advised their followers, today is considered to be sufficient without thought of tomorrow'. Contrastingly, the central selling point of guild socialism in the marketplace of neo-Marxism was its nuanced discussions of the future state. As we will see in the next chapter, many critiques of Bolshevism by guild socialists highlighted a lack of direction and guiding purpose in its attempted revolution. He also critiqued the revolutionaries for failing to realise that Germany still occupied around a quarter of the former Russian Empire. Epitomising the centrality of Germany's military defeat to his thinking, by June 1918, Orage described the Bolshevik regime in even more dismissive terms. It certainly was not the palingenetic event that he had hoped would redeem the country. 'The nettle which very few people have yet grasped', he stated, 'is that Russia is at this very moment not only a conquered country but a country in enemy occupation'. Consequently, he claimed that the new government held no more legitimacy than the authorities regulating Romania, Belgium or Serbia.

After the war, further passages bolster Orage's critique of Bolshevism. He argued that, by submitting to a Bolshevik revolution, the nation immediately became uncompetitive in the international sphere as its productive capacity declined dramatically. Moreover, this

[77] **Ibid.** vol.22/no.19 (1918), p.365–6.

development left Russia in a position where it was unable to fight a modern war, rendering it vulnerable to attack by a more competitive nation. In regard to promoters of Bolshevism in Britain, then, Orage asserted a clear message: 'Wars would be rather more numerous than fewer if this country were to go Bolshevist to-morrow'.[78]

For Orage, the First World War had generated many instances of change on the international stage, and he genuinely regarded the world as in a melting pot, ready to be cast anew. Through the lens of his guild socialist historicism, the war was an event capable of destroying a decadent era, and could even topple the hegemony of capitalism. However, despite the revolutions in Russia and American interventions in European affairs being characterised as truly epoch-shifting events, the changes that occurred during this period were, ultimately, disappointments for him. He was more hopeful for the future of Germany after the war, although in the final analysis, the idea of an international shift to the left inspiring social revolution at home, the central goal of his variant of maximal modernism, came to nothing.

An interminable 'sense of an ending'

Thus, at the end of the war Orage's overarching tone regarding the emergence of guild socialism was one of despondency, not hope. The world, as he saw it at least, was still in fundamental decline – despite the potential for revolutionary change offered by the war. In terms of national politics, as we have seen, he believed that Lloyd George's victory in the 1918 election was a foregone conclusion, postponing any fundamental shift in the constitutional and economic arrangements of the country. By the close of the war, he was clear on this point:

> *Any* Government not prepared for constitutional revolution must be regarded as reactionary at the present moment; and since it is obvious that the Unionist Government and personnel is prepared for anything *but* revolution, its days will be few and troubled. What or who will succeed Mr. Lloyd George's Unionist

[78] Ibid. vol.24/no.7 (1918), p.98–9.

> Government is, however, another matter. In the absence of a coherent Opposition, we may experience for a period a series of Governments by groups.[79]

We have already encountered Orage's view that the Labour Party needed to withdraw from any coalition government after the war, because Lloyd George would consciously seek to use the party as a scapegoat when – as was inevitable – he failed to maintain peaceful industrial relations in the postwar period. Instead, Labour could use the position as the dominant member of the disparate groupings forming the new parliament for 'gradually building up an alternative Government'. Its immediate future, he continued, lay in creating the foundations for a new epoch by building the economic and political foundations for power in a new period of transition.[80]

Commenting on the outcome of the 1918 election, Orage found nothing unpredictable in the share of the votes. He regarded the result as the final chance for capitalism to demonstrate its ability to redeem society: 'We are about to see what capitalism, with everything in its favour, can accomplish for the good of the world of which it declares itself to be the appointed saviour'[81] – a task in which he was sure capitalists would fail. Impregnating this negative view of the future under capitalism with a glimmer of hope regarding a socio-political transcendence of capitalist economics, Orage further claimed that, when capitalism proved incapable of ordering modern societies, the conditions would become ripe for a new system to emerge. Indeed, we will see this conclusion echoed by other guild socialists in the following chapter. Further, in addition to welcoming the failure of pacifist Labour figures, Orage praised the Labour Party for emerging as the largest opposition group. Now the party was vested with the potential to fulfil its historic role as the official Opposition.[82]

Meanwhile, despite his praise for Wilson's presence on the international stage, Orage also believed that the League of Nations would stymie attempts to overcome Europe's crisis. Indeed, the creation of the League following the war was the political development that Orage feared most. By late 1916, he was already critiquing this idea, on the grounds that it

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[79] Ibid. vol.24/no.4 (1918), p.50.
[80] Ibid. vol.23/no.4 (1918), p.50.
[81] Ibid. vol.24/no.9 (1919), p.129.
[82] Ibid., p.129–30.

failed to present an economic solution to the origins of war. Rather than solving economic antinomies, any League of Nations model would either have to maintain that all its members were very lightly armed – in which case the League would not be able to enforce its will through the threat of force – or they would need to be heavily armed, creating a new era of militarism. As an alternative, the real solution lay in making war economically undesirable. As we have seen, Orage believed that capitalists had clearly profited from the war, and so he stressed that 'if we want to put an end to war ... the means to be adopted is the equitable distribution of its cost over every class of the nation'.[83] The only way to curtail the potential for massive international wars, for Orage, was for the inauguration of a new economic internationalism. Regarding the League, such an institution manifested two fundamental flaws. Firstly, it would be an organisation composed of the diplomatic bodies of the existing nations, which he characterised as 'the most reactionary and least democratic' branch of each government's bureaucracy. Secondly, and more dangerously, the League would play into the hands of capitalism because, as a result of the war, international 'diplomacy and finance are more closely associated than ever before'. Consequently, the League of Nations would become a powerful international body representing the growing influence of the will of international finance.[84] This critique of the League of Nations put Orage at odds with H. G. Wells, a key proponent of the institution, at least in theory.

By the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919, Orage was despondent about the future of Europe. Arguing that imagination, magnanimity, and 'an exalted intellectual and moral courage' were all missing from the peace negotiations, he mourned the lack of a palingenetic shift within the structure of the proposals:

> No transformation of the world, such as the world hoped for, can be expected of the old wine thus spilled into the new bottles. Under new names the old evils are bound to re-appear and in a more dangerous form by reason of their change of name. Prussianism, for example, will be twice as dangerous when called precaution and defence as when it was exclusively associated with German militarism; and, similarly,

[83] Ibid. vol.20/no.2 (1916), p.25–6.
[84] Ibid. vol.23/no.25 (1918), p.391.

the old Triple and Quadruple Alliances will only have increased their covering-power for evil on being named the League of Nations.[85]

From this dynamic, Orage divined three potential outcomes, each evoking a sense of modernity descending further into decadence: first, world affairs would be dominated by the despotic rule of vast supra-national trusts; organisations with an international monopoly over a single product or cluster of products, the next advancement of the capitalist system. Second, the world would be reduced to fighting immense international wars dwarfing the previous conflict; in the worst case scenario, this would see Britain having to take on the new might of America. Finally, the entire international economic system could undergo a Bolshevik style revolution. 'The present war and the present peace', he concluded, 'are only the prologue to the portentous drama now beginning to unfold itself'.[86] The 'sense of an ending' regarding the capitalist era, which was augmented by the war, had not resulted in forcing socio-political transcendence, according to Orage.

By late 1919, influenced by his increasing appreciation of the role of finance in the dynamic of capitalism, Orage moved his economic critique of the allegedly decadent capitalist system from guild socialism to the economic ideas of C. H. Douglas. However, he dropped this scheme for economic renovation after a few years because he felt Social Credit to be far too complex as a practicable solution.[87] Following this rejection of European redemption through economic ideas, Orage embraced the mystical philosophy of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff.[88] Reflecting on this intellectual evolution in 1926, Orage admitted that 'the whole idea of National Guilds ... was wanting in some vital part. Somehow or other it did not "work" in my mind; the idea did not inspire my confidence'. Regarding the impact of the First World War – and echoing the words of Matthew Arnold – he continued:

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[85] Ibid. vol.25/no.9 (1919), p.141.
[86] Ibid., p.142.
[87] For a summary of the ideas of Social Credit, see: Taylor, *Orage and The New* Age pp.99–124; see also two essays by Douglas: "Economic Democracy" and "Credit Power and Democracy", both published in *The New Age*. "Economic Democracy" ran between June and August 1919, and "Credit Power and Democracy" ran between February and August 1920.
[88] For more on Orage's turn to mysticism, see: Louise Welch, *Orage with Gurdjieff in America* (London: Routledge, 1982).

> The Great War put an end to many things and many ideas; and among the latter was undoubtedly guild socialism. We woke from the evil dream shortly after the armistice; and in the horrible light of morning we began to count our losses. For me the realisation of the complete disappearance of the guild idea as a living potency brought no sense of disappointment, but rather of relief ... it was difficult to carry on a journal that lived by ideas in the absence of any living idea; and between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born.[89]

Further reflecting on his years editing *The New Age*, Orage claimed that he now believed all political reform to be impossible. However, he remained convinced that 'ye must be born again', but now considered mysticism and religion to be the intellectual schemas providing the best answer to the antinomies of modernity. 'Quite seriously', he continued, 'there appears to be no hope in the brotherhood of man secularly conceived; nor, may I add, in any system of morality, transcendental, naturalistic, or rationalist, taken by itself – no hope, I say, of any radical social reform'. Demonstrating his sensitivity to the nomic crisis of modernity, he resolved that any form of community without a conception of God was bound to failure, 'the only remaining hope for the serious social reformer is to "find religion", that is to say, find God'.[90]

Conclusions

To conclude this fist case study of maximal modernism, we can see that for Orage's guild socialism offered a redemptive vision to industrial workers, and for the nation generally, during the First World War. The wide-ranging reconstruction of his wartime views and opinions have taken us beyond merely identifying Orage as a maximal modernist and allowed us to see in some detail how he reacted to events, and cast them through a guild socialist lens. However, as we will see in later case studies, maximal modernism was not restricted to forms of neo-Marxism, and could have very different intellectual roots. Regarding Orage's case, as we have seen, during the war years he genuinely believed the capitalist system was on the verge of collapse. This was informed by his prewar belief in a

[89] *The New Age* vol.38/no.22 (1926), p.258.
[90] Ibid. vol.38/no.25 (1926), p.296.

revolutionary solution to the problems of modernity, which had been largely drawn from Nietzsche and then from neo-Marxism, that clearly formed his central critique of capitalism throughout the war. Orage's faith in the mythic core of a guild socialist revolution could not be sustained after the conflagration, however. When we consider Orage's prewar belief – presented clearly in *Friedrich Nietzsche, the Dionysian Spirit of the Age* – that cultures are either characterised by ascent or decline, it is clear that he regarded the war as a failure to bring about the revitalisation of western culture and society. Indeed, this was yet another chapter in its decline. Orage's resolution to this crisis of modernity after the war was to drop his commitments to the revolutionary socialist politics that had resulted in such a passionate outpouring of ideas and analysis during the war, in its place once again embracing the more mystical variants of maximal modernist thought. A detailed reconstruction of Orage's vision of a guild socialist economic revolution during the war, then, provides us with a nuanced example of the ideological praxis that resulted from an intellectual who refracted British political concerns through the lens of a radical confrontation with an allegedly decadent modernity. In the following chapter, we will see how fellow guild socialist ideologues developed their own articulations of maximal modernist thought in the pages of *The New Age* during the war.

Chapter 2: Guild socialist publicism in *The New Age*, 'Truly may we say that in the midst of death we are in life; that in the stress and tumult of war our vision of peace is clear and vivid'.

Having now detailed the ways wartime social and political events were refracted through Orage's ideological lens, this chapter will offer a survey of the publicism generated by other guild socialist figures which was printed in *The New Age* between 1914 and 1918. As this chapter will demonstrate, this publicism was of a very different nature to Orage's. Rather than engaging directly with the weekly flow of events, other guild socialist writings took the form of more considered essays, published either alone or in short series. The following chapter will offer a wide-ranging textual retrieval to précis many of these debates within the journal, revealing how guild socialists developed maximal modernist publicism throughout the war. Through this detailed survey of guild socialist debates, then, this chapter will highlight not only the vibrancy of thinking among guild socialists, but will also demonstrate how the ideology responded to crucial developments, such as the growing prominence of shop stewards' movement, the effects of war on workers returning from the front, and the radicalism created by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Therefore, as with Orage, this chapter will not simply seek to identify various figures from the guild socialist intelligentsia as maximal modernists, but move beyond the model itself and reveal the subtleties and nuances of the movement's publicism. Again, maximal modernism will be a point of departure rather than a destination. In so doing, it will reveal the mythic appeals to history, the organic sense of the nation, and further details of economic revolutionary praxis – each central to guild socialism – alongside some of the ideology's critiques of capitalist culture.

1914

Discussions on guild socialism, exploring the relationship between the proletariat, the war and the potential for National Guilds, quickly found expression in the early days of the war.

One of the first was entitled "War and After", where Odon Por[1] argued that political socialism had failed because of the fragmented nature of modern society. According to Por, there existed no socialist unity 'holding, so to say, man's body and soul' that was 'organically capable of withstanding the impact of military organisation'. In order for revolution to occur, the proletariat needed to attain a far greater level of self-organisation; therefore, 'National Unions are wanted which, beyond being ready to stop the nation's work, are also capable of assuming the functions of production'. Por proposed that new National Unions should be able to stop and start national production at will, would comprise 'every vital function of society' and, reflective of the impact of the revolt against positivism and positive imagery of soldiers, would possess a vital, organic quality that would compete with the sense of community offered by military organisations. These National Unions also required a 'revolutionary tendency, aiming at the reorganisation of economic relations'. Vitally, this

> organising vision, emanating from a living organism, comes into play only when the insurrectional tendency is accompanied by an active tendency towards expropriation of function. The union only becomes alive when it passes from passive resistance to attack, for only then does it release the powers of all-comprehensive activity.

Por was thus suggesting that an instance of *kairos* was coming for British society, claiming the 'historic moment of the proletariat is drawing near'. The socialists' spirit of unity was necessary, he concluded, and the movement must be professionally organised and capable of 'reabsorbing the soldier-proletariat'. The answer was to create National Unions, unique institutions to harness 'the common work and the communal spirit ... which alone can change the armies of destruction into armies of creation'. Properly organised, the National Unions would succeed because they could synthesise 'the two functions that make the history of mankind: the creative and destructive functions'. Yet should they fail, 'every aspiration for a new society will remain futile'.[2] By demanding a revolutionary restructuring of the Labour movement – alongside revealing the essential emotional verve required to

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[1] The Hungarian-born Odon Por later wrote a book on Fascist Italy in 1923, and continued to maintain links with Ezra Pound in the interwar era. For more on his interest in transferring the guild socialist system to Italy, see Odon Por, *Guilds and Co-operatives in Italy* (London: Labour Publishing Company, 1923); and on the impact of Fascism on Por's thinking see: Odon Por, *Fascism* (London: Labour Publishing Company, 1923).
[2] Por, 'War and After', *The New Age* vol.15/no.20 (1914), p.475.

inspire political modernism – for Por the new realities of the war were making revolutionary change seem a credible proposition.

Especially during wartime, nationalism became a central point of debate for the guild socialist movement. Epitomising this concern was a series of articles running from October 1914. Entitled "Geography and Human Grouping", these sought to explore the relationship between nationalism and the guild socialist revolution. Their author, Ivor Brown, was a regular contributor to the journal as well as a prominent theatre critic.[3] In his first article, Brown argued that the development of an internationalist idea for socialist revolution was a 'barren pastime'. Consequently, his vision for the successful prosecution of a social and economic revolution took 'existing territorial distinctions as the necessary basis for an economic revolution' due to the 'extraordinary vitality which still lies in Nationalism'. Despite the seemingly irrational nature of their borders, he continued, the fact was that the public were quite prepared to fight and die for nation-states. However, as the outbreak of war had revealed, the ruling classes simply had to play existing national sentiments off against each other in order to retain their hegemony, thereby using nationalism to divide the socialist movement. Brown concluded by noting that, for those interested in prosecuting political modernism through economic revolution, it was 'impossible to go beyond the nation at present'. Instead, they had to find ways to 'take up this weapon which lies ready to hand and endeavour to make the best of it'.[4]

Brown's second essay posited a link between the decline of religion and the need for a new force to recreate an international sense of European unity. In a war that saw Catholics in Germany and France, for example, fighting against each other, he felt that religion had 'faded into the mysticism of the individual, and as an organising power is no longer operative'. Further, Brown claimed that international peace through shared financial interests had also been revealed as a myth by the war, and cited Norman Angell as an example of specious thinking regarding the pacific nature of capitalist economics. He concluded that 'from the chaos of modern Trades Unionism could be built a Guild organisation'. If a national revolution of the Trade Unions could be repeated on an international scale, then 'the International Trades Union Conference would be one of the most important gatherings

[3] During the war, Brown was a conscientious objector as well as a guild socialist ideologue. Afterwards, he wrote for *The Manchester Guardian*, *Punch* and *The Observer*. He was also editor of the latter newspaper between 1942 and 1948. For further details, see: Ivor Brown, *Old and Young* (London: Bodley Head, 1971).
[4] Brown, 'Geography and Human Grouping, I', *The New Age*, vol.15/no.23 (1914), pp.545–6.

in the world'. Thus, in his vision of an alternate modernity, professionals – such as medical doctors, lawyers, and teachers – would develop international links; further, industry in general would be interconnected 'across the geographical barriers of race'. Finally, he argued that: 'We must look not to empty cosmopolitanism, but to Guild and professional patriotism, to take its place ... Attempts to build a European polity on contracts will inevitably collapse, because society cannot be constructed on contractual lines'.[5] The final two articles from "Geography and Human Grouping" continued and elaborated this line of reasoning, positing that nation-states were to remain a central factor of international politics for the foreseeable future. Yet, in their socialist form, they were becoming more 'organic' in nature, and were realising that they needed each other in order to survive and grow. This was perceived to be directly opposed to the capitalist model, with nations in competition with each other. The goal for guild socialism was to develop what Brown called 'unselfish International Will', one requiring 'spiritual bridges' that stretched 'across the moats of nationality', thus offering spiritual revolution as a resolution to decadent capitalism.[6]

S. G. Hobson,[7] cited earlier, and perhaps guild socialism's most influential writer, also concluded that the war had inaugurated a new form of consciousness hospitable to domestic revolution. As he put it, 'Liberalism and Toryism' had 'reached the end of their tortuous pilgrimages', as had 'political Socialism'. The question had become: 'Can any good come out of Hell?' For Hobson, the war had revealed a decadent 'economic and social system common to us all'. Repeating his assertion that economic power underpinned the political realm, Hobson argued that German expansion was ultimately the result of its economic success following the country's unification, and had even 'nurtured the militarism against which we are supposed to be fighting'. According to this perspective, capitalist materialism and decadence could be seen under the surface phenomenon of German militarism. Importantly, like Brown, Hobson believed that the war had initiated a moment of profound national crisis, uniting the nation as a single, communal unit, thus 'giving a sense of universal fellowship with all our nationals, as of men bound together in some great

[5] Brown, 'Geography and Human Grouping, II', ibid. vol.15/no.24 (1914), pp.569–70.
[6] Brown, 'Geography and Human Grouping, IV', ibid. vol.15/no.26 (1914), p.620.
[7] Hobson came from a Quaker family residing near Newry in Ireland. In his youth, Hobson aspired to enter parliament, though he soon became disillusioned with constitutional politics. A profound sense of idealism, and an equally deep-seated disgust of the extant political system in Britain, fuelled his guild socialist outpourings. For more on Hobson, see his autobiography: S. G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1938); and also G. Taylor, *Orage and The New* Age (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2000) pp. 47–57.

enterprise or overwhelming danger'. He argued that the proletariat from each warring country, 'having experienced this most thrilling of all human fellowships', would try to recreate this vital experience in domestic industry. He then asserted the similarity in social organisation between the guild socialists' system and the Army: both were viewed as noble alternatives to capitalism's wage system.

Hobson's argument centred upon the radicalising effect of army life. 'Wagery is for the servile', he claimed, 'will our war veterans be servile? We think not.' For him, the 're-entry into industry of a million men ... necessarily means re-adaptation, inevitably bringing discontent – a highly inflammable material in altered circumstances'. The postwar scenario, then, would be characterised by acute unemployment, a result of the lack of credit in the financial system that would create a downturn in national industry. In such a reality – one where 'capitalism will be apologetic' – organised labour could even begin to take over the functions of capital; for example styling itself as a repository of credit. A workforce unified by common combat experiences would be able to negotiate with capitalists 'not as individual employees but as an organisation' and demand a partnership in the management of industry. Further, returning soldiers would be able to argue that, having 'staked our lives for our country, we now demand recompense'. Hobson, had prophesised in late 1914 that 'war has prepared the path for Guilds'[8] – as we shall see, he developed many of these ideas throughout the war, especially in 1918.

1915

In a prolific year, Ivor Brown initially wrote two articles that continued to map the relationship between nationalism and revolutionary guild socialist economics as the answer to the alleged spiritual antinomies facing Europe at war. The first of these argued that authentic nationalism was peaceable and respectful of other nations, indeed it celebrated their diversity. Further, wars of national aggression were motivated by capitalist imperialism and not, in the final analysis, by nationalism itself. He also claimed that economic revolution could only be successfully organised along the lines of 'historical geography'. Such an undertaking required a sense of a 'common fatherland', though *expressly* this was not a racial community predicated on the idea of a 'common blood' because such racial communities

[8] Hobson, 'Guild Principles and the War', *The New Age*. vol.16/no.3 (1914), p.67.

were as aggressive as imperialist and capitalist ones.[9] Brown's second article in the series extended his claim that fundamental reforms had to be made to the collective European psyche. Otherwise, following the war, competing nations would become like caged lions, and Europe would remain threatened by the unconsciously aggressive tendencies of a rapacious capitalism, alongside its imperialistic and racial forms of nationalism. However, in a guild socialist state, Brown's mythically-constructed, peaceable variant of nationalism would predominate:

> Those who believe in Industrial National Guilds, in using, that is to say, a fine ideal to make a revolutionary approach to modern conditions, will be ready to appreciate nationalism which keeps what it has of good and is prepared to build on the foundations of to-day by the introduction of a fresh architectural design.

Brown cited the Elizabethan era as a time when Britain possessed 'a great unity of will and purpose', and it was in such eras when 'the nation felt at one that the nation was most creative'. By uniting the nation rather than having it divided between two classes, guild socialism would once again be able to create this type of creativity, 'a national spirit and a national art'.[10]

In April, Ivor Brown began a series of essays called "Aspects of the Guild Idea", which outlined more clearly his guild socialist vision. These critiqued both Fabianism and feminism, and railed against the idea of modern warfare. The first article argued that socialism had failed in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth as a result of a decadent 'dreamy optimism' manifest in Fabians and likeminded intellectuals such as H. G. Wells: 'in this world of dream and decay, of smouldering organisations and of political corpses that stank to heaven, Socialism was discredited, weakened and waned'. Guild socialism – defined here as the attempt to link the revolutionary spark of socialism with the modern Trade Unions – was the British solution to the problem of reviving the revolutionary verve of the socialist movement, and was deeply rooted in the ideas of Robert Owen and William Morris.[11]

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[9] Brown, 'Nationalism and the Guilds, I', ibid. vol.16/no.11 (1915), pp.274–5.
[10] Brown, 'Nationalism and the Guilds, II', ibid. vol.16/no.12 (1915), pp.305–6.
[11] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, I', ibid. vol.17/no.1 (1915), p.7.

The second article surveyed ways in which capitalism rendered a sense of decadence within society, most clearly manifest in the ubiquitous presence of a sentimental tenor in popular culture. Brown found it axiomatic that mankind aspired to beauty but, as the alienated worker in modern society could not find beauty in his work, 'the revolting wash of modern sentimentalism is the outlet of humiliated man's desire for beauty'. Though under constant attack by capitalism, the human drive towards beauty would never disappear completely, 'so long as there is some spark for self-expression and decoration ... so long there is hope'. Socialism needed to ensure, however, that it touched 'a real emotion in the English soul'. This failure to appreciate beauty compromising both Fabianism and other reformist forms of socialism, alongside capitalism itself, made all three similar for Brown.[12]

The third article continued this concern for reconnecting with higher, abstract values via socialism with a discussion on Plato. He argued that modern socialism failed because it had been unable to appreciate the psychology of either the working classes or nations, and simply told 'the soul of man what it ought to need'. Guild socialist ideologues must be ready for a 'probing of the human soul' that would turn 'the soul's eye towards reality'. By so doing, they would rediscover the innate human drive towards achieving true freedom and the good life. Brown then focused upon the alleged mendacity of wartime capitalists, arguing they were but the latest form of corruption faced by authentic freedom. For example, wartime workers had to support the armaments industry, yet this also generated 'exorbitant profits for the real shirker'; namely capitalists. For Brown, this was just one example of how the desire to achieve the good life was stymied by the moral flaws inherent to the capitalist system. Nevertheless, the willingness to support national service was an important one, and needed rewarding. The nexus between the 'good', 'freedom' and 'duty' thus offered 'the Guildsman a chance to touch a live desire and to raise it to a higher level', and 'concepts of militarism' would be blended with the 'peaceful and productive concepts of industry' with the dawn of a guild socialist order.[13]

The fourth article argued that guild socialism offered a more intelligent solution to the crisis of industry than either anarchism or Fabianism, meanwhile the fifth article outlined a mythic, and ultimately teleological, history about the death of guilds in the Middle Ages and their rebirth in the future, which ran as follows. The decline of guilds was a result of a

[12] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, II', ibid. vol.17/no.2 (1915), p.31.
[13] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, III', ibid. vol.17/no.3 (1915), pp.54–5.

series of historical circumstances, starting with the Black Death in 1349, which had paved the way for the emergence of a new agricultural proletariat that was later absorbed by the industrialising cities. With the subsequent rise of industry on a national scale, the remaining structures of the old guilds 'perished through negligence and the synthesis of unfortunate facts that culminated in the Industrial Revolution'. The emergence of capitalism, therefore, was essentially the result of a series of historical accidents that needed to be reversed imminently. Brown argued that the old guilds clearly possessed deep-seated flaws, primarily regarding their embrace of rigid class structures, an error that needed to be avoided in the future guild system. Further, their projected recreation 'cannot be accidental and must be fashioned and willed'.[14] In the subsequent article, we get a further sense of the total renovation that would be realised by the envisioned National Guilds. For Brown, the 'Guild idea is not so much a philosophy of anything as a philosophy of everything'; it was this total sense of life that distinguished the ideology from the 'vague "reformisms"' of the nineteenth century. The latter only broached 'the appealing chaos of Capitalism', yet failed to develop a 'theory that seemed to grip the whole problem'.[15]

In the final two essays, we find a more detailed articulation of the revolutionary dimension of guild socialism, looking backwards to move forwards. This blend of past and present was intended to be the blueprint for a new modernity in the future:

> The Guild idea will return, not in its pristine form, but fused with the wider relationships and vaster activities of the modern world. We cannot expect the future to carry us back to pedlars and fairs, to self-contained and self-sufficing boroughs ... But we can at least hope that the lurch of history will carry us one step towards medievalism, and let us pause there, not eternally and of fixed purpose, but merely to take up a load of old ideas, that we may sift them, and weave those worthy into the web of our existence.[16]

The past was not simply regarded as a model for the future, but the ideology's futural dynamic did look backwards in order to flesh out its vision of renewal for British society.

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[14] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, V', ibid. vol.17/no.5 (1915), p.102.
[15] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, VI', ibid. vol.17/no.6 (1915), p.126.
[16] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, IX', ibid. vol.17/no.9 (1915), p.198.

This Janus-faced aspect to the ideology's vision of the future is important when appreciating how guild socialism offered an idiosyncratic form of revolutionary maximal modernism.

The final article brought the discussion back to the war. Brown highlighted how the nineteenth century had seen a massive increase in the pace of modernisation, which would, in all probability, increase still further. Yet, as a consequence, all human activities had 'become business. All romantic activities of man are commercialised and made mechanical.' This was especially true of war, an activity that, in previous eras, may have possessed a romantic dimension, but in 1915 'it is certainly not romantic when No. 171623 of the 2505 infantry regiment of the 250th division is destroyed by an equally remote number firing a gun twenty miles off'. Modern war, then, was revealed as another dimension of the same callous, impersonal world of a decadent modernity which was epitomised by capitalist economics. Put simply, war was just another form of business. His articles concluded with the point that capitalism created two types of mentality. Firstly, an acceptance of the capitalist mindset, resulting in a repression of emotive engagements with its contradictions and baseness, in a sort of spiritual death; or secondly the rejection of capitalism's logic, which led to a dismissal of all reformist solutions to its antinomies, and ultimately to the idea of National Guilds as the only way to retain an authentic sense of transcendent, spiritual life within modern society.[17]

In late 1915, Ivor Brown also offered a seven part series called "Gilders of the Chains". Here, he critiqued prominent cultural figures and trends that allegedly exemplified modernity's decadence, especially in making capitalism seem more palatable, thereby stymieing the desire for revolution. 'The new capitalism of pleasure has made remarkable progress in the last decade', he claimed, and 'the whole effect of our ever-increasing music-halls, picture palaces, and corner houses has been to give colour to what was drab, and thus to persuade the worker – especially the office worker – that the world is not so bad after all'. In his critique of Joseph Lyon's chain of tea houses, he argued they were a 'pan-Gentleman' movement attempting to induce an ostensible civility that actually legitimised the immoral division of labour intrinsic to capitalism. Echoing Karl Marx's observation that history repeats itself in the form of farce, Brown warned that, in the decadent, pleasure seeking capitalism of the future, the 'Christians will be thrown to the Lyons, but there will be no

[17] Brown, 'Aspects of the Guild Idea, X', ibid. vol.17/no.10 (1915), p.221.

fighting in the den for both will need each other'.[18] Elsewhere in these articles exploring the new developments in mass culture, Brown also criticised Charlie Chaplin. For him, this was the epitome of capitalism's promotion of decadent cultural production. Brown claimed that the human mind had innate, though currently repressed, tendencies towards enjoying joviality and idiocy as forms of entertainment. However, because capitalism had created people so fiercely and avowedly concerned with 'the struggle for wealth', the resultant population could not find humour in anything but the most inane entertainment. Chaplin, a clear product of capitalist modernity for Brown, exemplified this culture, and acted as a release valve, the 'Great Release', for the alleged meaninglessness of a capitalist existence. His was a 'farce, superbly unreal, eccentric, alien to any purpose or order ... that is the Great Release'.[19] The following article stressed that Chaplin was an ephemeral child of the era, and called on cultural production 'to recapture beauty and to reinstate emotion, to find virility somewhere, that is the task'.[20] Brown's maximal modernist viewpoint, then, sought to escape the decadent-seeming quality of Chaplain's comedy, and so he posited the need for a new culture to counteract the negative consciousness that could be diagnosed by the presence of such populist figures. Another article critiqued the rise of department stores as a further instance of capitalism's decadence. The owners of such institutions, according to Brown, were largely interested in image over content; for example, they kept 'a lounge a restaurant, a reading-room, a rock garden, an observation tower – but a shop? Well, incidentally perhaps, but don't mention the vulgar fact.' In wartime, this new style of 'white-washing industrialism' wallowed in the myth that such outlets were engaged in national service rather than the pursuit of profits. Journalism, 'modern civilisation's substitute for literature', was also critiqued as decadent. Picking out *T. P.'s Weekly*, *John Bull*, and the *Daily News*, among others, Brown argued that such journals were dominated by 'Sensation, Sentiment, Scurrility and Sex'. This practice of 'gilding the chains' of capitalism through populist print media had reached new heights during the war, again epitomising capitalism's decadent qualities.

Apart from Brown, Maurice B. Reckitt contributed four essays collectively titled "The Prospects of the Guild Idea". This series ran along similar lines to Brown's vision for

[18] Brown, 'Guilders of the Chains, No. 1 – Sir Joseph Lyons', ibid.vol.17/no.20 (1915), p.470.
[19] Brown, 'Guilders of the Chains, No. 2 – Charlie Chaplin', ibid. vol.17/ no.21 (1915), pp.494–5.
[20] Brown, 'Guilders of the Chains, No. 3 – Charles Garvice', ibid. vol.17/no.22 (1915), p.518.

guild socialism.[21] Here, Reckitt explained the difference between the guild idea and other left wing ideologies was that 'the evolution of the guildsman is a "creative evolution", the product in large part of human will, emancipating in method as in aim'.[22] Like other guild socialist ideologues, Reckitt asserted that revolution could only come from below, with the Trade Unions taking over the management of industry from capitalists. This would be achieved by following the guild socialist axiom: economic power preceded political power. Consequently, he emphasised the pursuit of economic negotiations with the state by organised labour, rather than the path of obtaining leverage over capitalists through political representation by Labour MPs in parliament, as the pathway to revolution. A new world and a renewed sense of the importance of the state as the overarching governing principle would emerge as a result: 'Society is more than a mere horde of consumers; its past memories and its future destinies, all that concerns its public life, centres in the State – and the State is born, not made'.[23] Out of the materialism of capitalism, he concluded, Trade Unions must develop a partnership with the state if a decadent era of servility for industrial workers was to be prevented.[24]

A range of viewpoints regarding details of the ideology characterised the guild socialist movement. Revealing the diversity within the guild socialist intellectual community, contrary to Brown's emphasis on guild socialism requiring a new form for both state and for nationalism, W. N. Ewer[25] expressed a variant of guild socialism articulated without these concepts; indeed, he opposed them. Over a series of four articles published between November 1915 and March 1916, Ewer presented a recent history of the evolution of the modern nation-state. His narrative began in the Middle Ages, when the

> social structure of Europe was an intricate network of groups, overlapping, interlocking, shifting and changing: no rigid system, but a live organism of spontaneous, autonomous, societies, acknowledging no master, but unconcernedly managing their own business in their own way.

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[21] Maurice B. Reckitt was both an Anglo-Catholic and an early supporter of guild socialism. Between 1931 and 1950, he also edited *Christendom, A Journal of Christian Sociology*. For further details, see: John S. Peart-Binns, *Maurice B. Reckitt: A Life* (Basingstoke: Bowerdean and Marshall Pickering, 1988).

[22] Reckitt, 'Prospects of the Guild Idea, I', *The New Age* vol.17/no.19 (1915), p.445.

[23] Reckitt, 'Prospects of the Guild Idea, III', ibid. vol.17/no.21 (1915), p.494.

[24] Reckitt, 'Prospects of the Guild Idea, IV', ibid. vol.17/no.22 (1915), pp.517–18.

[25] In addition to supporting guild socialism, following the war, Ewer wrote for the *Daily Herald* and was also suspected of spying for the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

Mythically constructing historic events in order to simplistically present modernity as a decline from a spiritual sense of reality, Ewer contended that, before the Renaissance, Christendom was 'one articulate whole'. However, by the close of the fifteenth century, he argued, the modern State had come into being. Monarchs cemented their power in increasingly centralised national units, and Leviathan, an 'intolerant' and 'jealous beast', had emerged. 'In the name of national unity and state sovereignty', Ewer lamented, 'the free associations of the Middle Ages, whether religious or political or industrial, were to be destroyed or reduced to a mere servile dependence upon omnipotent governments'.[26] In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, British history witnessed how the guilds of the Middle Ages became emasculated, nearly to the point of non-existence: the 'spirit' had gone out of them, according to Ewer. In its rise to dominance, the modern state 'slew, deliberately, and for its own purposes, the very idea of free and spontaneous associations'.[27] Ewer's final article claimed that the state was essentially unchanged since the sixteenth century, though, perhaps, there had been some superficial alterations to its constitution, such as the decline of aristocracy and the rise of what he viewed as an ostensibly democratic parliament. Nevertheless, the military prowess of the modern state – concerned ultimately with centralised power and national unity – was clearly again ravaging Europe, as it had done periodically since the sixteenth century. Modern guild socialism thus needed to 'establish an organic diversity in place of a mechanical unity'; and aimed 'at the revival of self-governing, self-existing corporations which shall not be servants but partners of the State in working to secure the full and free life of the individual'. Arguing that 'the national idea destroyed the guild idea', Ewer implored guild socialists to aim at destroying the national idea: 'We must effect a transvaluation of political values ... We must uncrown the State ... We must, as national guildsman, be internationalists: for international conflicts necessitate entire national unity and entire State-sovereignty'. By ending nationalist ideology that invariably underpinned international conflict, and therefore pulling the rug from underneath the Leviathan of the modern state, Ewer concluded that the need for national unity would

[26] Ewer, 'The State and the Guilds, 1 – Leviathan', *The New Age*, vol.18/no.1 (1915), p.8.
[27] Ewer, 'The State and the Guilds, 3 – Destruction of the Guilds', ibid. vol.18/no.6 (1915), pp.126–7.

whither, and the Leviathan state would die alongside it. Only this could create the potential for palingenesis creating a guild socialist new order.[28]

1916

In early Spring 1916, Ivor Brown argued in an essay titled "After the End" that, in terms of material factors alone, it was only logical that capitalism would be strengthened by the war. This was because the holders of capital were becoming ever more highly organised, whereas Labour's prewar advances in organising itself were being undone by wartime legislation. Nevertheless, aside from such 'material' concerns, there was a 'spiritual' question to be answered: what effect would several years of fighting have upon the returning solders? On their return, transformed by their experiences in the trenches, the distaste of the wage system among soldiers could become a powerful force, one capable of overcoming the traditional British aversion to revolution.[29] In a similar tone, albeit more hopeful regarding the revolutionary potential that could be manifest within this returning force, was part IV of a series called "Little Epistles". Here, various contributors addressed opponents of guild socialism in imaginary debates. Talking to "A Man of Affairs", the author, who simply signed the article "Agricola", talked of the war as an event akin to a sudden earthquake. Any domestic politics responding to this state of instability could not pretend that there could be an orderly transition from past to future, for 'our earthquake is not only material', it continued, 'it is spiritual'. In terms of a 'quickening sense' of 'esprit in the best French sense', "Agricola" noted that 'we have recently undergone a profound spiritual change ... young men have suddenly understood that life, if it is to be lived with dignity, must have a more definite purpose than was the case in those irretrievable days before the war'. As a consequence of this renewed spiritual communion, "Agricola" stressed there 'must, there shall be, some higher order of society', that 'our fighting men will return with their eyes open. They feel they have been fighting for themselves and not you and your class.' A massive growth in national debt would help to destroy the capitalist system, the piece suggested, but ultimately it would be transcended because great 'masses of men will come together, almost spontaneously, into guilds, to serve in an industrial army for pay and not for

[28] Ewer, 'The State and the Guilds', ibid. vol.18/no.21 (1916), pp.490–1.
[29] Brown, 'After the End', ibid. vol.18/no.18 (1916), pp.423–4.

wages, and with an assured status. Affairs have changed, my man of affairs', the article concluded, 'and you must change with them.'[30]

In Summer 1916, Professor Edward V. Arnold offered several series of essays detailing how and why he believed moving to a system of National Guilds was needed during the war, as a means to victory. His first series of essays, "Trade Unions and Friendly Societies in the Roman Empire", explored the themes of prosperity and decay in the Roman era, drawing parallels between the Roman experience and wartime conditions. In making such comparisons, Arnold identified a condition where both societal growth and its decay could exist concurrently, and claimed that it 'may be that the British Empire is now at this very stage: whilst red strips are being added to the map of the world there is already degeneration in the great cities of the island home country'. These articles also sketched out a cyclical view of the lifespan of states, arguing that that they are born, they often have a virile youth, yet, after reaching maturity, can weaken and degenerate, at which point they can become susceptible to destruction by some external force. New, youthful states were always ready to supersede decadent states, some of which would then stabilise into mature states, while others would die off.[31] Following this summary of British decline and a mythic, cyclical philosophy of history, Arnold delivered two articles entitled "Germany: Her Strengths and Weaknesses". These detailed problems with the structure of the British state, and argued that the war's outcomes would produce a new balance of powers. The current crisis, he continued, was a clash of nations predicated upon the principle that might is right. In order to secure national objectives, the might of Britain needed to exceed Germany's; there was no room for compromise over this principle either on moral or ethical grounds.[32] 'The task which awaits the British statesman', Arnold concluded, 'is to build upon the foundations provided by the history and ideals of its citizens a structure which they will be prepared, even at the cost of life itself, to defend against all attacks from without or within'.[33]

Following these two series of articles, Arnold delivered a final set of essays called "Social Organisation for the War". This collection drew together his analysis of trading

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[30] Agricola, 'Little Epistles. IV – To a Man of Affairs', ibid. vol.18/no.23 (1916), pp.537–9.

[31] Professor Edward V. Arnold, 'Trade Unions and Friendly Societies in the Roman Empire, I', ibid. vol.19/no.15 (1916), pp.345–8; Arnold, 'Trade Unions and Friendly Societies in the Roman Empire, II', ibid. vol. 19/no.16 (1916), pp.366–371; Arnold, 'Trade Unions and Friendly Societies in the Roman Empire, III', ibid. vol.19/no.17 (1916), pp.391–4.

[32] Arnold, 'Germany: Her Strengths and Weaknesses, I', ibid. vol.19/no.18 (1916), pp.414–16.

[33] Arnold, 'Germany: Her Strengths and Weaknesses, II', ibid. vol.19/no.19 (1916), pp.439–41.

organisation in the Roman Empire, and the broader philosophy of international war and the life cycle of states. Here, Arnold argued that the 'present is the time for new social organisation', rather than revolution in a postwar milieu. He sketched a negative image of the socio-political resolution for the continent should Germany win, outlining its geopolitical dominance of Europe, restrictions on the British Navy and so forth.[34] Arnold again criticised the structures of the British state, arguing that, unlike the highly organised Germany, Britain was 'unscientific, dilatory, and wasteful'. He then pointed out that victory in the war was far from inevitable, and that the country still faced a threat to its very existence. In order to win, the co-operation of the working classes would be vital, as would radical modernisation by the state. It was crucial to 'sweep aside all the prejudices and obstructions which come from those who are wedded to decaying social forces'.[35]

His third article delivered the substance of his vision. He argued for the creation of a guild system of government based on ten guilds (Mining; Shipbuilding; Iron and Steel; Agriculture; Textiles; Pottery; Building, Housing, and Furniture; Provisions; Clothing; and Distribution). Each guild would emerge from the existing divisions between employers and workers: employers would become the 'officers of the industrial army', and the workers would become the 'rank and file'. Each party would be represented in an upper or a lower chamber of a series of new parliaments, one for each guild, which would have its own exchequer funded by profits and taxation of the guild's members, and would legislate for a particular trade. They would also offer social welfare schemes for the elderly and the sick. Guilds would thus become small states within the nation, and would be responsible to an overarching structure comprising a national parliament and treasury. Arnold argued that this revolutionary reorganisation of the country's industrial makeup and political constitution would, in fact, be an extension of ideas already initiated by the Munitions Act. He also detailed how the mood of patriotism that had been created by the war was essential to his palingenetic vision for the future. Indeed, the revolution could

> only be carried out by a people penetrated by the spirit of patriotic self-devotion, but the seeds of that spirit were sown in the shambles of Ypres and the battlefields of

[34] Arnold, 'Social Organisation for the War. I – Introduction' and 'II – German Policy in the Great War', ibid. vol.19/no.21 (1916), pp.488–490.
[35] Arnold, 'Social Organisation for the War. III – The History of the War from the German Standpoint' and 'IV – England at War, ibid. vol.19/no.22 (1916), pp.512–514.

> Loos and Neuve Chapelle, and a rich crop is now growing up, ready to be gathered in by the statesman who has the courage to trust the instincts of his fellow-citizens.[36]

Meanwhile, Arnold's fourth essay discussed the confiscation of wealth that was necessary to introduce the new model for industrial relations. He argued that, because the wealthy would feed into the upper chambers of the various National Guilds, they would have some protection against unfair treatment, and would not be losers in the transfer to a new order. Further, the increased efficiencies of national production projected for the guild system would also provide justification for large programmes of wealth confiscation.[37]

Arnold's final article dealt with the issue of opponents to such schemes of political modernism. Largely focusing on pacifists, but also aiming at all who, in his eyes, acted primarily in their self-interest rather than that of the nation, Arnold argued that the state had to impose a sense of duty on the individual, one vital in order to achieve a healthy sense of community. Refusals to serve the in the nation's army, he continued, cut 'at the root of all social life, and it is an outrage to the collective conscience'. Later, he added that 'dissidents' must 'take up their proper place as British citizens, and help as best they can in the nation's life-struggle'. Indeed, it was this national 'life-struggle' that not only justified the switch to the guild system but was conceived as a conflict that embraced both the nation's history and future. Claiming the war was a fight for a national ideal, Arnold phrased this point thus:

> It is for England as she has been known to us in the history of the centuries, for the law of Europe as we conceive it in the centuries that are to come. This ideal does not promise us individual happiness; it demands from us effort, thought, self-sacrifice. We did not make it; we worship it.

If the future was to be characterised by peace, then Britain needed to be strong in war; faith in a palingenetic shift to guild socialism was the means to this end.[38]

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[36] Arnold, 'Social Organisation for the War. V – The Organisation of Labour', ibid. vol.19/no.23 (1916), pp.536–537.
[37] Arnold, 'Social Organisation for the War. VI – The Organisation of Wealth', ibid. vol.19/no.24 (1916), pp.559–560.
[38] Arnold, 'Social Organisation for the War. VII – The Dissenters', ibid. vol.19/no.25 (1916), pp.482–4.

Another detailed articulation of how National Guilds would occur as a consequence of the war was presented by S. G. Hobson in a series of articles called "The Permanent Hypothesis". These critiqued various voices calling for moderate reforms of working conditions, such as expressed in the Garton Memorandum, and by the Fabians. Hobson's ideal for reconstruction would be based on 'a genuine passion, stirred by the war, for a more equitable system of life', entitling him to base his critiques of various models for economic reconstruction by asking 'whether they are motivated by prudence or by the heroic aspect of reconstruction, by a genuinely crusading spirit'. The eponymous 'permanent hypothesis' itself was the idea of economists and others which argued that the proletariat must be treated as a commodity.[39]

Hobson argued that this hypothesis was seen as an iron law of economics by most reformers. Meanwhile, the economic system of National Guilds did not rely on conceiving workers as a commodity. Nevertheless, guild socialism was an entirely feasible system that would be more efficient and create economic as well as political democracy, thereby disproving the 'permanent hypothesis'. Workers would have a voice in the running of their National Guild and would be liberated from the state of *de facto* slaves, as they were supposedly rendered under the capitalist wage system. His second article highlighted how the war had created some progress on this issue. The various models for reconstruction had acknowledged the necessity for a shift in the status of labour, although Hobson insisted that when 'these concessions are spontaneously offered by employers, it is not for us to accept them with whispering humbleness ... labour must demand the maximum. If only the Labour leaders .... Alas! There is none; no, not one.'[40] Like Orage's analysis, Hobson lamented the alleged failure of these older figures, people who were stymieing the revolutionary movement. Rather than embracing political modernist radicalism, in this case guild socialism, Hobson believed that they were always hypnotised by the myth of the permanent hypothesis.

Hobson's third essay in the series followed this grim conclusion with a vision of freedom. Suggesting that 'it is surely the opening of a new epoch when we turn our backs upon the old system', Hobson argued that there existed a 'spiritual hiatus in English life'. Ultimately, this was due to a lack of dignity, sense of unity and self-respect among much of

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[39] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. I – The Roots of Discontent', ibid. vol.20/no.1 (1916), pp.7–9.

[40] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. II – Quo Vadis?', ibid. vol.20/no.2 (1916), pp.30–31.

the country's population. 'The moral difficulty that confronts us', he continued, 'is that the permanent hypothesis destroys the self-respect of Labour, compelling it not only to value itself on a commodity basis, but to acquiesce in the morality of its masters'. The permanent hypothesis and freedom for all were mutually exclusive concepts, according to Hobson. In turn, he argued for a new social contract to be fully developed, one governed by four key points: '(a) a more or less blind revolt against degrading conditions; (b) the imperative necessity of a more scientific and efficient system of production; (c) the call for a higher spiritual and moral life; and (d) a revivified passion for freedom'. The 'old social contract' he noted, 'has been dissolved by the war' as both the employers' and the workers' conceptions of the other were being radically altered. He concluded that a new social contract would crystallise this sense of political modernist change. As he put it, transcending to a new economic system would be 'a revolution in all our ways – our way of thinking, our way of acting, our way of faith. Invariably so, because the mass of mankind shall have mounted to a higher plane'.[41]

Later essays also highlighted the need for an active revolutionary principle guiding the transition to guild socialism. Hobson's view throughout was that the ideas of an inevitable transition to a socialist economy were the unsophisticated myths of an earlier age.[42] He also explored the way in which the capitalist economic system treated workers as a commodity though an analysis of unemployment. A guild system would look after all members in any given sector of the economy, whereas the wage system only paid those it deemed necessary for its needs.[43] He also distinguished the guild system from a collectivist state model which again would fail to remove the principle of wage slavery, simply transferring the problem from private capitalists to the state.[44]

The final essay, "In War", detailed the relationship between Hobson's permanent hypothesis and the wartime conditions. Several key points emerged here. Firstly, he noted how the wage system had been pushed to one side in some sectors of industry by the war – especially in the army – allowing many ordinary workers temporary freedom from the status

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[41] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. III – The New Social Contract', ibid. vol.20/no.3 (1916), pp.54–6.
[42] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. IV – Outlines', ibid. vol.20/no.4 (1916), pp.78–80.
[43] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. IV – Outlines (Continued)', ibid. vol.20/no.5 (1916), pp.101–2.
[44] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. VI – The Collectivist Alternative', ibid. vol.20/no.7 (1916), pp.149–51.

of wage-slave. Secondly, it had been acknowledged, both by the industrial leaders and by the state, that co-operation with organised labour was essential to win the war. Hobson emphasised that these gains should be built upon, and detailed schemes for joint councils of Trade Unions and employers, along with government representation for directing each industry for the national war effort, were positive steps towards guild socialism. Further, like Orage, Hobson claimed that the present parliamentary system was stymieing 'national life' due to incompetent administration. It needed to be replaced by a modernised system, one more suited to enacting the functions of political representation. 'Psychologically', he continued, 'men are more ready to experiment, to make concessions, to adopt new ideas'. Wartime, then, had created a sense of urgency and a moment of *kairos* unique in history, and therefore offered an opportunity for a comprehensive reform of the nation's political economy:

> Truly may we say that in the midst of death we are in life; that in the stress and tumult of war our vision of peace is clear and vivid. Never in times of peace have we realised how false is the permanent hypothesis; nor did we see the true bearing and incidence of unemployment; nor did the urgent need of industrial autonomy assert itself so instantaneously; nor did we understand how vital is functional definition and freedom.

Hobson continued by stating that rejecting the permanent hypothesis was 'the one emancipating movement that can demand of us that emotional and spiritual energy without which no new era can be approached, much less begun'.[45] It was necessary to abolish the capitalist hegemony, then, during, and not after, the war in order for a revolutionary shift from a decadent capitalism to a healthy guild system to be realised.

[45] Hobson, 'The Permanent Hypothesis. A Critique of Reconstruction. VII – In War', ibid. vol.20/no.10 (1917), pp.223–5.

1917

In contrast to Hobson's analysis, in January A. J. Penty[46] contributed to the debate on the revolutionary climate created by the economic conditions immediately after hostilities ended. His essay, titled "After the War", began by asserting that the present war marked 'the close of an era in our civilisation'; it was 'the inevitable catastrophic ending of a society which has chosen to deny the laws of its own being'. This, he continued, required the reconstruction of society on a new set of principles. The activities of the state were, in fact, slowly bringing about the potential for a new era of guilds – not, as widely believed, an era of collectivism. He suggested that determining whether the state conformed to a collectivist model meant assessing if it either placed industry into the hands of state officials, or if it served to protect workers from capitalist abuses. The former would be a collectivist solution, the latter would see the state taking on the role of a guild; it was the latter trend that Penty detected in the economics of the war, especially in the policy of fixed prices.

Further, after the war, 'tendencies to-day towards the servile conditions of labour' would be resolved by industrial conflict: 'it needs but the unemployment problem which will follow the war to open wide the floodgates of anarchy and revolution'. Penty had determined that the war was the result of German economic instability, an aggressive war which was the only way for the country to prevent its economy from crashing down. The war thus stemmed from Germany's decadent capitalist modernity, its 'unregulated machine production'. This somewhat contentious point was essential to Penty's argument. Indeed, for him, this was the central truth to be learned from the war: 'I do not exaggerate when I say that so far as our welfare and happiness is concerned it is a matter of life and death with us that this fact should be publicly recognised'. In consequence, Penty sided with the political modernist sense of return to a guild system, particularly as this alternative modernity would be able to redress the balance between man and machine, stymieing the present trend for workers to be replaced by mechanised production.[47]

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[46] A. J. Penty was an architect by training, and was a devout Anglo-Catholic. He was a longstanding member of the Church Socialist League, and 'converted' to socialism after reading the work of William Morris. Penty was also heavily influenced by John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold and Edward Carpenter. After the war, he pioneered the concept of a 'Post-Industrial' society. For more on Penty, see: Taylor, *Orage and The New Age*, pp.10–24.

[47] Penty, 'After the War', *The New Age* vol.20/no.11 (1917), pp.246–48.

Another perspective embracing a system of National Guilds came from G. D. H. Cole,[48] in a set of articles titled "Reflections on the Wage System". On the whole, these did not present the war as a cataclysmic moment, allowing for the swift transfer to guild socialism. Rather, the war was an event that opened credible discussion regarding a shift in the relationship between capital and labour, potentially ushering in a phase of transition between capitalism and National Guilds. Nevertheless, at some point in the future an apocalyptic yet revolutionary moment would still be necessary for the switch to become complete. 'For the present', his second article concluded, 'the task of the workers is to concentrate on increasing and perfecting their control of their labour, which is the basis of their industrial power'.[49] Continuing this theme, Cole's fourth article asserted the need for democratic control of factories, as a first step towards the abolition of capitalism. The ultimate solution to the problem would be found by removing the underlying functions of capitalism: 'we shall succeed in overthrowing industrial capitalism only if we first make it socially functionless ... This means that, before capitalism can be overthrown, there must be wrested from it both its control of production and its control of exchange'. With a strong, nationally organised Trade Union movement, this process could commence. Then it would become possible to extend Trade Union responsibilities to management, ushering in a transition period of 'joint management'. This was expressly not a compromise between a permanent state of ostensible partnership with employers in the management of industry. Further, this transition phase could only come about with a renewed sense of idealism among Trade Unionists. Cole was confident that a taste of authority would encourage a greater thirst for power within the Trade Union movement.[50]

Vital to the success of this transitional period was not mere control of the means of production, but to 'secure control of the product', the topic of Cole's fifth essay. This point was directed in three ways: the acquisition of raw materials; the disposal of the finished product; and deciding how to invest capital. For Cole, the recent rise of the large-scale

[48] Cole was another central figure in the guild socialist movement. He was a key player in the National Guilds League, created in 1915 as an institution seeking to move it away from the intellectualism of *The New Age* in order to make it more accessible to the average worker. He had embraced socialism after reading Morris' *News form Nowhere* in 1905; after this, he had been interested in the ideas of the Fabians and later the guild socialists. Aside from these political pursuits, Cole spent most of his life as a scholar, and was based at the University of Oxford. For more on Cole, see: Taylor, *Orage and The New* Age, pp.68–75; and L. P. Carpenter, *G.D.H. Cole: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[49] Cole, 'Reflections on the Wage System. II – Labour and the Labourer', *The New Age* vol.20/no.21 (1917), pp.487–8.

[50] Cole, 'Reflections on the Wage System. IV – the Control of Production', ibid. vol.20/no.23 (1917), pp.534–5.

capitalists and financiers – now dominant over the other two key figures of capitalist economic power, the smaller employer and the managing director – mirrored the fall of the guild system during the Middle Ages, when that system was undermined by a rising merchant class able to control capital. As a result of the war, the powers of the state over industry were increasing, while workers were gaining greater powers in their workshops. The continuation of these two processes alone could not bring about the fall of capitalism, though it may result in state-directed capitalism. Only by acquiring power over capitalism's methods of exchange would it be possible to seize upon this temporary reversal in historical trends caused by the war. The wartime conditions, then, were creating what he called 'a breach in the system', allowing for the goal of revolution to be pursued. Increased industrial power and political representation had to work consciously towards a final, cataclysmic moment. 'The more we are inclined to foresee catastrophic action as the last stage of the coming social revolution', he stated, 'the more prepared we must be for the evolutionary steps which alone can pave the way for the great catastrophe'. Blackleg proof unions and the united will of workers were both necessary conditions for the success of his political modernist vision of a final general strike capable of overthrowing capitalism.[51]

In his subsequent article, Cole argued that the increased power of the state over raw materials, alongside greater control over the distribution of finished products, would not in itself result in a move away from capitalism. This view led him to again assert the need for a future cataclysmic moment: 'Only the manpower of an awakened people can defeat the economic power of a clever capitalism'. Here especially, Cole wanted to refute arguments suggesting that the time for revolution was near simply because of wartime reforms. Rather, greater organisation of the Labour movement, alongside the conscious need for fundamental change, was required before a move towards a guild socialist system could actually be initiated.[52] This was akin to Gramsci's concept of a 'war of position', the building up of a counter-hegemonic force, before initiating a final 'war of manoeuvre'. Cole's final article added some further nuances to this point, urging that in the near future guild socialists needed to prepare for a transitional period of reform in order to increase the workers'

[51] Cole, 'Reflections on the Wage System. V – The Control of the Product', ibid. vol.20/no.24 (1917), pp.557–8.

[52] Cole, 'Reflections on the Wage System. VI – Purchase, Sale and Investment', ibid. vol.20/no.25 (1917), pp.581–2.

economic power, though this engagement had to be guided by a longer term revolutionary goal.[53]

As with Orage, we also get a sense of how the February revolution in Russia impacted on guild socialist thinking. This was exemplified by an article entitled "The Case for a Military Guild", published in May 1917. The author, who signed the essay simply "T. C.", argued that the lessons events in Russia presented to those seeking an economic revolution was the way in which an army's right to strike could loosen the grip of those in control of capital. 'The ultimate power of the capitalist', the article continued, 'is vested in the forces of the nation'. A union between workers and a nation's army would therefore undermine the powers of the capitalists. Further, events in Russia had given the entire nation a voice in the way the war was managed. Such a development internationally could 'eliminate the waging of wars for capitalist imperialism'. Nevertheless, without radical restructuring and the democratisation of capital, Britain would only further its progress towards becoming a servile state. Events both in Russia and in the war more generally, it concluded, had seen the issues of 'Man-power' and 'National Service' come to the fore, marking 'the opening of a new phase of national development ... Profiteering has been thrown into ugly contrast with the new spirit of National Service, and it is universally evident that they cannot co-exist.' "T. C." was adamant that the decadent 'profiteer must go', and his economic system with it.[54]

In August, Hobson contributed two articles on the theme of reconstruction, in response to the news that a Ministry of Reconstruction was to be formed. The problem was raised by the meaning of 'reconstruction': did it refer to the 'rehabilitation of the old, or do we mean the deliberate scrapping of the old that the new may be built upon the old site?' The article called for the revaluation of the functions of the professional classes away from their false, commercial value, and towards their true value to society. For the ministry to genuinely move the nation forward by initiating the truly radical measures that Hobson believed were required, one 'must take nothing for granted; every grade of society must go through the mill'. 'We must all be born again', Hobson continued, 'Carlyle's picture in "Sartor Resartus" must become a reality'. The new consciousness of the returning soldiers, he stated, would help bring about the will for such a socio-political transvaluation.[55]

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[53] Cole, 'Reflections on the Wage System. VII – After Wagery', ibid. vol.20/no.26 (1917), p.606.
[54] T. C., 'The Case for a Military Guild', ibid. vol.21/no.3 (1917), pp.54–5.
[55] Hobson, 'Real Value in Reconstruction', ibid. vol.21/no.16 (1917), pp.346–7.

At the end of the month, Hobson returned to these themes, offering his readers more details on the need for a revaluation of social values that truly took into consideration their collective function, unlike decadent capitalism. It was necessary to adopt a new system of economic arrangements that would 'leave the existing interests *boulerversé*, for the new class relationships thereby created involve other conceptions of property, and varying and different claims upon social power'. He was clear that 'there can be no revolution within the ambit of the present industrial system'. A system of National Guilds would end the confused sets of values currently functioning within society, and would abolish the privileges of the capitalist classes. This, in turn, would usher in a new era, alongside what he described as 'a saner way of life'.[56]

In December, Penty offered a short essay on his conception of the state, and how this would differ from other guild socialist thinkers like Hobson. Penty did not view the state as a spiritual entity, because it was concerned with matters entirely temporal. Its function was to 'give protection to the community: military protection in the first place; civil protection in the next; and economic protection in the last'. Of course, the creation of guilds would provide such economic protection, not least because currently the decadent capitalist state was failing spectacularly in this task. For Penty, the most important problem facing the state was an 'acceptance by reformers of Rousseau's doctrine of "the natural perfectibility of mankind"'. Unlike the majority of socialists, who were subliminally recapitulating what he regarded as a central tenet of liberalism, Penty claimed that he did not believe in such perfectibility. He continued that capitalism – 'a chaotic and disorderly growth' – was a result of the removal of economic protection by the state in the centuries that saw the guild system of the Middle Ages decline. The key point accepted during the Middle Ages was the idea of Original Sin, the polar opposite to Rossueau's philosophy.[57] It was this acknowledgement of Original Sin that created order in society, giving the state justification for extending economic protection, via support for guilds, to the whole of the social order. Though the war was helping to break down the idea that capitalists could be left to their own devices, or that western civilisation would automatically progress to a perfect human society, it was not destroying the liberal idea of the perfectibility of man. Until this decadent idea was

[56] Hobson, 'Claim and Counterclaim', ibid. vol.21/no.18 (1917), pp.382–4.

[57] Such a rejection of Enlightenment thinking, and praise of a time before the Renaissance where Original Sin allegedly was a universally accepted truth, is also highly evocative of T. E. Hulme's thinking in this period. For more on Hulme, see: Robert Ferguson, *The Short Sharp Life of T. E. Hulme* (London: Allen Lane, 2002).

destroyed, it would be impossible to reinvest modernity with the strict sense of morality manifest, according to Penty, in the Middle Ages.[58]

1918

With the war turning against Germany in the summer, Hobson offered several articles about the transition to guild socialism. The first, a standalone piece called "The Criteria of Peace", argued that any peace conference could not merely 'reconstruct civilisation', but needed to 'register and formulate a new-born civilisation of which the horrors of the war are but the birth-pangs'. The article detailed how 'economic democracy' was necessary for the future of the world. It was therefore imperative not only for Labour representatives, both British and German, to insist on being 'present in force' at the future peace conference, but also that the world grasped the underlying point that 'the economic solution is as much Labour's affair as the capitalists' and of major importance in the discussions'. To escape from the conditions of international capitalism that had led to the war, Labour movements had to demand and insist on 'a new economic *regime*'.[59]

Following this polemic, Hobson offered a series titled "Chapters on Transition", attempting to highlight the need for a switch to guild socialism. To do this, the ways in which the war had fundamentally altered the conditions of society needed to be explored. The first of these essays argued that the correct concept for comprehending the complexities of society was not to see it as a lump of clay able to be remodelled into various new forms, but that it was a 'vast living organism, all its parts evolved in the slow process of time and by patient, human effort'. Extending this view, he continued with a metaphor of modernist creative destruction: 'since society is a living organism, it often contracts ailments that call for treatment, diseases that need the surgeon's knife'. The successful revolutions of the past had been just such surgical operations, and they had needed to be properly prepared for in order to produce lasting change. The current social sickness was the commodification of labour; therefore, if 'a surgical operation becomes imperative, it will be the extirpation of wagery'. The transition to National Guilds was, he concluded, a 'vital principle and process in our national life'.[60] The second essay focused on the failures of the labour movement to

[58] Penty, 'The Function of the State', *The New Age*, vol.22/no.9 (1917), pp.165–6.
[59] Hobson, 'The Criteria for Peace', ibid. vol.23/no.8 (1918), p.118.
[60] Hobson, 'Chapters on Transition – I – Signs of Change', ibid. vol.23/no.10 (1918), pp.148–9.

realise that economic power preceded political power. 'The problem', he argued with regard to the political aspect of organised Labour, 'is to correlate the political revolution thus accomplished with economic realities: to give legal form and civic consent to the new industrial system'. However, without a determined bid by organised labour to transcend the economic realities of the wage system, the reformism engendered by political Labour was detrimental to the movement because it prolonged the era of 'wagery'.[61]

Hobson's third essay discussed the position of the present governing classes in the future system. Any revolution

> must compel unquestioned obedience to the new order, on pain of swift dismissal ... Government is a function; but unless strictly subject to the will and policy of the citizen-State, it becomes a tyranny. An economic revolution unguided by sound citizenship may also become a tyranny.

Further, the monarchy would have no place in the new order: 'In an economic democracy, a monarchy is not only incongruous but impossible; citizenship itself assumes the sovereign quality'.[62] The final essay in this series, "The Solvent of War", explored how the war was creating a unique social dynamic. 'The war has entered into our being', he stated, and it 'will leave behind legacies and influences whose effects will be felt for all time'. The main thrust of this article, then, was to claim that the war was shattering the principles of labour as a commodity:

> It is not the labour commodity the Army asks for; it is men. Neither is it the labour commodity that munitions factories demand; it is men ... The economic distinction between man's body and the labour power in it ... has been torn to shreds in the violent reactions of war.

Hobson clearly felt the war was only being discussed by leading politicians as one in defence of democracy. Yet, it was far from certain that it would lead to an economic democracy of the kind envisaged by guild socialists: 'War is certainly a potent solvent', he concluded, 'it is

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[61] Hobson, 'Chapters on Transition – I – Signs of Change (continued)', ibid. vol.23/no.12 (1918), pp.182–3.
[62] Hobson, 'Chapters on Transition – I – Signs of Change (continued)', ibid. vol.23/no.13 (1918), pp.198–9.

our business to understand and apply the solutions it throws up from the depths of its cauldron'.[63]

These essays were followed by a longer series titled "The Workshop", a further contribution to Hobson's "Chapters on Transition". Placing his hopes primarily upon the new trends employed by the shop stewards' movement,[64] Hobson detailed how the transition from capitalism to guild socialism was being hurried along by the unprecedented developments in industrial relations created by wartime conditions. He reaffirmed his distinction between the compromise of labour gaining 'part control' in the management of industry (which would result in a permanent resolution continuing the wage system as proposed by schemes like the Whitley Councils), and the need to usher in a temporary period of 'joint control', with the ultimate aim of transferring all management duties of industry to the labour movement. Hobson stressed the need for the amalgamation of unions, in addition to democratic principles to enter the workshop. He also raised the idea of unions securing collective contracts with employers, from which they, rather than employers, would issue their members' salaries. This would be a 'halfway stage between existing workshop conditions and Guild organisation'. Whereas the creation of workshop committees possessing a voice in the management of industry was 'static in conception, based on the permanent hypothesis, the principle of collective contract possesses within itself the magic of its own metamorphosis'.

Crucially, this new type of union, an Industrial Union, would not only have sufficient capital to inaugurate its own banking system – a point Hobson had already articulated embryonically at the beginning of the war – but from such funds, it could extend its role to controlling the supply of raw materials as well as that of labour. The idea of collective contracts negotiated by Industrial Unions, then, would break 'into the sacred arc of the capitalist covenant'. This would set in 'motion the forces hitherto deemed to be strictly within the control of the employer'.[65] Central to new trends in the industrial workshop was the emergence of the radicalised shop stewards, 'the stormy petrel of approaching industrial unrest'. For Hobson, these figures had emerged as a result of the failure of existing trade unionism to provide leadership to the proletariat both before, and especially during, the war.

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[63] Hobson, 'Chapters on Transition – I – Signs of Change (continued)', ibid. vol.23/no.14 (1918), pp.214–5.
[64] For more on the increased powers of shop stewards during the war see Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: MacMillan, 1975), esp. p.76.
[65] Hobson, 'The Workshop. III – Collective Contract, *The New Age* vol.23/no.18 (1918), pp.283–4.

They marked 'the assertion of local rights and necessities as against centralised direction' and 'the inception of trade-union amalgamation, now imperative, if trade unionism is to fulfil its rightful destiny in the industrial future'.[66]

Consequently, Hobson claimed in the following essay that the failures by the Labour movement during the war stemmed directly from the blunders of an over centralised movement. 'The real line to pursue was to develop the local spirit', alongside encouraging 'local autonomy, to decentralise power, to recognise the efficiency of that democracy for which we had presumably gone to war'.[67] As with Orage, Hobson's publicism praised the radicalism of the shop stewards, essentially in an attempt to woo them to guild socialism. Therefore, his subsequent article underscored his view that the new shop stewards – the 'new men' as he called them at one point – were the epitome of the realisation that the workshop, not the local branch of a Trade Union, was now the nerve centre of the consciousness of the proletariat. It would be shop stewards who would force the amalgamation of unions, combating the ineffective centralisation currently characterising Trade Union activity, thereby 'bringing the worker of every grade into organic cohesion'.[68] Extending this point in his penultimate article, he stated that the shop steward now constituted the visionary avant-garde figure of a new era in which industrial relations had been radically modernised. The revolutionary shop stewards had

> a new and fresh point of view; he has broken away from the sectional methods of the trade-union branch; his unit is the workshop and not the trade-union. He no longer regards the bench as the perquisite of his particular craft; the shop presents itself to his eye as a ganglion of labour nerves, all related to each other, touching each other, within reasonable bounds of equal significance and industrial value. Viewing the workshop in this light, he immediately awaits industrial amalgamation, with unified command, that he may more quickly achieve strategic victory, where formerly only minor tactics prevailed.[69]

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[66] Hobson, 'The Workshop. IV – The New Shop Steward Movement', ibid. vol.23/no.19 (1918), pp.298–300.
[67] Hobson, 'The Workshop. V – War Conditions and the New Shop Stewards', ibid. vol.23/no.21 (1918), pp.331–333.
[68] Hobson, 'The Workshop. VI – The Industrial Unit and the New Shop Steward', ibid. vol.23/no.22 (1918), pp.346–7.
[69] Hobson, 'The Workshop. VIII – Wage Inequalities and Trade Union Personnel', ibid. vol.23/no.24 (1918), pp.378–9.

Hobson's concluding essay in this series asserted that the new 'community of industrial interests', and the potential development of Industrial Unions – distinguishable from Trade Unions by the presence of collective contracts and compulsory membership, the development of its own banking system, and fully harnessing energy and verve of the new shop stewards movement – did not represent a complete survey of the conditions of the workshop and its control. Nevertheless, his outline, he claimed, set out a series of ideas that were 'the stuff of a new life, the seeds of a new epoch'.[70]

In the late summer, Penty offered additional articles elaborating upon the necessity for a transfer to a guild system by drawing out the ideology's spiritual as well as material dynamics. Demonstrating how permutations of maximal modernism could see alternate radical stances as their direct competition, Penty compared National Guilds favourably with what he regarded as the erroneous, materialistic revolutionary ideas of British communists – largely found within the auspices of the Plebs League and the Socialist Labour Party. (It is important to recognise this aspect of competition between alternate forms of maximal modernism, each competing for the attention of those attracted to radical standpoints. Indeed, this reveals an inherent propensity for a diversity of opinions and ideologies among those being dubbed maximal modernists by this study.) In "National Guilds v. The Class War", Penty argued that the struggle for ideas preceding a revolution was between guild socialists and these 'Neo-Marxians'. 'As the situation develops', he stated, referring to his envisioned economic chaos after the war, socialists 'must cleave either to a purely materialistic or to a spiritual conception of the nature of the problem which confronts us'. He also contested the idea that class hatred, especially towards the lower middle classes, should become the focus for any revolutionary impulses. Despite protests to the contrary, guild socialism was not a defence of the lower middle classes, Penty argued. Like the communists, guild socialists also sought to transcend the class system. Yet, unlike their 'materialist' revolutionary counterparts, they also saw the need to create a sense of unity between the lower middles classes and the proletariat, one which placed as its ultimate aim the dissolution of both categories following the creation of a new economic reality.

According to Penty, it was important for the public to realise the fact that the real strength of the guild idea lay in the way it would emerge from the workshops across the

[70] Hobson, 'The Workshop. XI – Some Implications of Control', ibid. vol.23/no.25 (1918), pp.394–5.

country, democratising economic relations from a grass roots level upwards. Further, the only way out of capitalism's inevitable 'climax in its development' was to look backwards, to the Middle Ages: 'The whole trend of economic development from Renaissance times onwards, which has led to the enthronement of capitalism, has been to reverse the mediæval order'. By recognising the centrality of reconstructing the spiritual reality of this era, along with aspects of its economic relations, guild socialism appeared as the only alternate modernity that offered a solution to the profound spiritual and material problems of the day. The aim of guild socialism was 'nothing less than to restore the unity to life which the Renaissance destroyed'; for it sought to 'change society by changing the substance of thought and life', and, 'unlike other movements which have aimed at spiritual regeneration it deems it advisable to begin at the economic end of the problem in the belief that it is only by and through attacking material and concrete evils that a spiritual awakening is possible'. The affirmation that the problem 'is both spiritual and material', he concluded, distinguished the guild socialist vision from 'Neo-Marxian philosophy'. The poverty of revolutionary materialism both explained why such an outlook was undesirable in Britain, while also pointing to the fall of the Russian Bolshevik regime in the near future.[71]

Penty went even further in agitating for an alternate modernity in an essay from September 1918, "On the Class War Again". This article renewed his critique of 'Neo-Marxians' like Walton Newbold. Framing the postwar milieu as one of a 'great struggle between Capital and Labour', he claimed that the only way for the latter to secure an immediate victory was for 'the army to make common cause with Labour when it returns from France'. This was likely, according to Penty, though such a victory would not be the end of the matter. 'In our anticipated revolution', he stated, 'the moderate party will come first'. The Labour Party, then, lacking a radical drive, would drift towards collectivist principles, and would 'dilly-dally'; thus, 'all its actions will be feeble'. Following this period of compromise, Penty predicted that 'the great crisis will arrive and our future history will depend entirely on the way it is met'. At this point, the 'Neo-Marxians (our Bolsheviks) will get their chance', potentially resulting in a Soviet-style, Bolshevik anarchy for the country. Guild socialists, then, had to dismantle what Penty regarded as the impoverished ideals of British 'Bolsheviks' immediately, thereby preventing those sympathetic to political

[71] Penty, 'National Guilds v. the Class War', ibid. vol.23/no.16 (1918), pp.250–3.

modernism from believing that the Russian model formed the only solution to modernity's antinomies.

More specifically, guild socialists had to demonstrate how their competitor's ideology lacked a clear sense of social theory from which to create a new society, and reveal how it was simply obsessed with the process of gaining power for its own sake. 'They do not propose to change the system', he stated, 'but only its ownership'. Guildsmen, on the other hand, 'not only have questioned industrialism, they have some idea of what to put in its place', thereby saving society from successive wars and steering it towards the security achieved by harking 'back to the Middle Ages for inspiration guidance'.[72] Penty was clear that the battle for the future hegemony of either a guild socialist or 'Neo-Marxian' future was occurring in the present. The resolution of this conflict could not wait until the outbreak of the final crisis. It had to be resolved in the present.

From the 14 November, in a series of essays titled "The Influence of the War upon Labour" – another in the "Chapter on Transition" series – Hobson offered a review of labour conditions resulting from the war. These articles extended the ideas he had already developed in the summer of 1918: the importance of the shop steward movement; the concept of a new style of trade unionism pursuing a vigorous policy of amalgamation alongside seeking collective contracts; becoming responsible not only for the supply of labour but ultimately also of raw materials; and guild socialism developing its own banking system. In his first article especially, Hobson also discussed the importance of the 'new spirit pervading the rank and file of the Labour movement', epitomised by the shop stewards. The war had encouraged individual initiative, and events such as the Russian Revolution, the Stockholm Conference, alongside food shortages and other domestic crises, had 'stimulated interest in world-problems'. Soldiers would return in a buoyant mood, he continued. During the war, 'where they have faced, unflinching, grave reverses, and won through by a national tenacity', workers underwent a change. Thus, 'they will not be slow to turn to industrial purposes. A victorious citizen army will not submit to industrial oppression, if its leaders are as wise as the men are brave.' The prestige of capital had waned during the war, he claimed, and Labour alone, 'out of all the factors of our national life, has maintained its functional standard'. Further, the war had demonstrated that 'it is not state control but rather industrial

[72] Penty, 'On the Class War Again', ibid. vol.23/no.21 (1918), pp.330–1.

control that will provide our salvation'. Labour could regard the war period 'with pride and satisfaction', for it had emerged from war:

> with an invigorated faith, a widened horizon. Our men return trained to vast operations, their minds coloured by great conceptions. The fusing of new principles with these unexampled experiences opens vast vistas of an industrial destiny more consonant with sanity and the humane. Labour has glimpsed the meaning of economic freedom. In the terror and devastation of war, in the sombre memories behind us and the sordid necessities before us, this stands sure: there is a new vision, and the people shall not perish.[73]

The spirit of the trenches, for Hobson, had inculcated in the grass roots of the labour movement a renewed vigour, an overarching sense of purpose, and a renewed belief in its destiny. By resisting the divide and rule tactics of capitalism, by building on this new mood, and by amalgamating Trade Unions, and in contrast to Orage's more gloomy outlook for the future, Hobson's publicism was convinced that a new era transcending the wage-system of capitalism could emerge by the close of the war.

Conclusions

To conclude, we can again see that, by taking the maximal modernism model as a point of departure, we have been able to examine in detail the revolutionary dynamics of guild socialist publicism. By taking us much further than merely offering an identification of maximal modernism in the pages of *The New Age*, this textual retrieval has been able to show the diversity of opinion present within guild socialist thought. Figures such as Ivor Brown, S. G. Hobson, G. D. H. Cole, and A. J. Penty clearly provided many nuances to guild socialism's analysis of capitalism as a decadent form of modernity in the pages of *The New Age*. In so doing, they described, in detail, how their form of political modernism would engender economic revolution. *The New Age* during the war, then, was defined by a genuine revolutionary culture, and many of its central contributors firmly believed in the possibility of what this study has called 'palingenesis'; in this case as a form of economic revolution, as

[73] Hobson, 'The Influence of the Wart upon Labour. Being a Second Chapter on Transition. 1 – A General Survey', ibid. vol.24/no.2 (1918), pp. 21–3.

a consequence of the war – a shift of a great enough magnitude to legitimise the sacrifices made on the battlefield. What is also striking about these articles is the way in which the battlefield itself is little featured in debates. Aside from generalisations about the heroism of the front line soldier, for the most part, events on the Western Front impacted little on the ideology's publicism. Thus, the central goal of guild socialism remained more or less unchanged throughout the war, though its publicism did respond to the flow of events.

Indeed, at the war's outbreak the apocalyptic mood itself was considered important in engendering change, then developments such as the Munitions Act, the emergence of Whitley Councils, and especially the radicalism of the shop stewards movement impacted upon guild socialist thinking. There was also a shift in the tone of the analysis during the war, with Ivor Brown's cultural commentaries coming to the fore in 1915 and early 1916, while Cole, Penty and Hobson dominated the debates in the later years of the war, often expressing a far more coherent and detailed economic rationale for revolution. Further, by 1918, the threat of Bolshevism had entered the guild socialist debate, and so defining the movement against this competitor ideology became an essential aspect of guild socialist thinking. In short, the war changed how guild socialists conceived their revolution occurring but not its ultimate ends. Finally, it is worth noting the contrast between the publicism of Orage and these essays. Whereas Orage's writings were concerned with the weekly flow of events, refracting them through a guild socialist lens, these writings offered more depth to the notion of guild socialist revolution, providing detailed critiques of capitalism, and rationales for the transition to the new order.

Having now surveyed the diversity of guild socialist intellectuals – who were able to develop a broadly consistent critique of capitalism and contrapuntal revolutionary vision in some detail – we can see how one set of thinkers were able to inject idealised versions of the past with the radical verve of maximal modernism. This fusion created a dynamic, futural vision, and so we can characterise guild socialists as a revolutionary, avant-garde intelligentsia that sought to remake society through a particular variant of neo-Marxism. However, maximal modernism could find expression through a wide range of intellectual systems, not merely variants of Marxism. Indeed, any attempt to diagnose a sense of decadence and promote the transition to a new era could hold maximal modernist properties. Such views were often present in *The New Age*, so let us now revisit the non-guild socialist publicism

published the journal. This final survey will complete our examination of the maximal modernist publicism printed by the magazine during the First World War.

Chapter 3: Maximal Modernist debate in *The New Age*: 'Suddenly the most terrific thunderstorm is upon us ... And now the sniff of fresh air'

Following the outbreak of hostilities, aside from guild socialism, *The New Age* played host to the views of many desperate intellectuals. Therefore, this final chapter on the journal will further précis the positions of a series of maximal modernist intellectuals who were prominent in the journal's pages during the war. What follows will demonstrate the diverse range of what this study has dubbed maximal modernist cultural production in *The New Age*, focusing on the relationship between the war and numerous diagnoses of cultural decadence and visions of a new age. Like the previous two chapters, one of the key aims of the analysis here is to demonstrate not only how a series of intellectuals conformed to the maximal modernist model, but also how they developed contrary and diverse responses to the war. As we shall see, the intellectuals surveyed here foresaw rebirth as a possibility for Britain, and for western society generally, through a number of intellectual paradigms. What will emerge from this analysis is the sense that *The New Age* was more than simply a vehicle for propagating guild socialism, and instead during the war maintained its reputation as a Little Magazine able to host multiple radical perspectives and points of view. Even in wartime, Orage's stewardship ensured that, rather than merely 'representing' existing ideas, the journal acted as a lively forum for 'presenting' and developing a diverse range of new ones. By moving away from guild socialism, we will see this multiplicity of views that can be compared and contrasted by the maximal modernist model, and so clearly the concept should not be thought of as a single, coherent stream of opinion.

1914 – 1916

Immediately following the outbreak of war, and aside from the rhetoric of Orage's "Notes of the Week", Romney's "Military Notes" column conveyed the tone of the initial phase of war fever among European intellectuals. For example, it claimed in August that 'I think we may say with Goethe on a former occasion that we are assisting at the birth of a new epoch'.[1]

[1] Romney, 'Military Notes', *The New Age* vol.15/no.15 (1914), p.341.

Similarly, Alice Morning's "Impressions of Paris" series manifested palingenetic tropes in her reports on the war fever in France; for instance, she claimed that some of her socialist friends were 'already building free utopia in the futuristic German and Austrian republics', promising 'an entirely new reconstructed idea of the art of life'.[2] However, it was not until the end of August that contributors began offering more detailed analyses of events, laced with modernist tropes of decadence and rebirth. An excellent example of this style of publicism came from Oscar Levy's article "Nietzsche and this War".[3] Here, Levy dismissed the notion that Nietzsche was the epitome of German militarism, as was so often argued in the contemporary press. Rather, Levy claimed that it was the ideology presented in Houston Stuart Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (a book Levy disagreed with profoundly), that carried the thinking underpinning German militarism. For Levy, it was Chamberlain's idea that the Teutonic race formed a new ideal capable of redeeming the world, not Nietzsche's superman, which was to blame for German aggression. Nietzsche was actually contemptuous of German nationalism, Levy continued, noting that Nietzsche possessed a European vision, embracing the cultural influence of France especially. Like Orage, Levy thought that Nietzsche would have welcomed the war. This was not because Nietzsche was a rabid militarist, as so many wrongly thought, and he would have been highly critical of the vulgar and, in his eyes decadent, nationalism that had led to it. 'There is no doubt', concluded Levy,

> about the growing consumption and decadence of Europe during the last and our own century; there is no doubt that everywhere wrong values have been creeping into men's consciences, the values of the weak, the tame, the lame, the social, the humble, the crooked, the cunning, the dishonest, the botched and the bungled.

For Levy, this view of modernity as decadence allowed him to see how it 'poisoned' both the people and the leaders of Europe to the extent that 'no-one could any longer have preserved an upright and honourable peace, and all have drifted into a general conflagration. So the

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[2] Alice Morning, 'Impressions of Paris', ibid. vol.15/no.16 (1914), p.371.

[3] German in origin, Oscar Levy settled in London in 1894, and spent much of his time subsequently championing Nietzsche's philosophy in Britain. For more on Levy's critique of western culture, see: Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) ch.1; and David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England, 1890 – 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) esp. pp. 40–49.

brutal cure has come at last."[4] Both the trope of war as purification, and the idea of combat as the ultimate solution to a decadent European modernity, then, clearly underpinned Levy's argument.

Discussions of prominent German intellectuals continued the following week, in A. E. R.'s[5] weekly "Views and Reviews" column. Arguing that Bernhardi's book, *Germany and the Next War*, had been entirely misunderstood in Britain as only a polemic of German militarism, A. E. R claimed that Bernhardi had, in fact, 'done us a service by insisting on the necessity of war'. He continued that 'civilisation tends to negate war, it tends to unreality', and so civilised people often failed to see that war and peace formed a dialectic. Periodically, the violence of war was necessary, as it kept civilised peoples from descending into decadence. However, civilisation often forgot the need, on occasion, to embrace its antithesis in order to revitalise the conditions for existence. As with Levy, then, A. E. R. also argued that western civilisation had embraced decadence and comfort, especially in recent years. This, he claimed, was the new barbarism, not the militarism of Bernhardi's type. In short, he argued that 'Civilisation is a conspiracy to avoid calamity', although sometimes 'calamity cannot be avoided'. In his embrace of a tragic world view, A. E. R. argued that one had to recognise that 'the destructive power of calamity is inherent in the process of growth', and that war is without purpose if 'it does not set free the creative activity of man'. He concluded by eliding the destruction of war with the creativity of genius:

> Genius, seeing the need for destruction, will destroy ... destruction is only an incentive to and an opportunity for creation; militarism and culture do not really stand in antithesis but in sequence to each other; and war remains intrinsic to reality and necessary to civilisation.[6]

Another instance of war presented as maximal modernist style creative destruction, alongside an accompanying rhetoric for mythic renewal, in A. E. R.'s weekly "Views and Reviews" column, which was usually devoted to lengthy book reviews, can be found in

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[4] Levy, 'Nietzsche and This War', *The New Age* vol.15/no.17 (1914), p.393.
[5] A. E. R., actually A. E. Randall, was one of the first writers in England to draw upon the theories of Freud in analysing literature. He also took the pseudonym John Hope Francis when writing the weekly "Drama" column for the journal. For more details, see: Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) p.125 and p.140.
[6] A. E. R. 'Views and Reviews', *The New Age* vol.15/no.18 (1914), p.424.

October 1914. Here, he claimed that the war was putting an end to an English complacency that regarded her empire as a God given fact – 'what God spoke in Hebrew, he meant in English', the article mocked. Through combat, the nation was discovering its true spirit of honour, destroying the idea that, for the English, 'the religion of valour has been superseded by the religion of velleity, that Thor was beaten once and for all at the beginning of the eleventh century'. By engaging in war with a country possessing the 'grandeur of soul' of Germany, Europeans suddenly found themselves 'back in the sagas, battling with heroes for the dominion of the world'. 'We shall win', he continued, 'only because we can still revert to the religion of valour, because we also regard Christ as the eternally crucified'. Although he was sure that Germany would lose the war as a result of military errors, eventually 'our empire will be challenged ... by some other heroic nation; for it is intolerable to the soul of man that the bourgeois should sit in the seats of the mighty'.[7] A. E. R.'s argument, then, was predicated upon notions that only through continual military challenges could the nation remain vital, preserve a mythic sense of authenticity, and prevent itself it from descending into decadence. In this embrace of the aesthetics of a warrior mentality, the article even quoted the final lines of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "The Challenge of Thor", framing Germany's actions as the challenge made by the Norse god of thunder and war. It was this belligerent, mythopoeic register that the German confrontation called for.[8] The following week, he confirmed the view that the war was an event effecting fundamental change to the moral makeup of the continent: 'Nietzsche did not make this war, this war will make Nietzsche; for it is effecting a transvaluation of all values; or, at least, is forcing people to define their ideals of the purposes of civilisation and the nature of man'.[9]

Meanwhile, several discussions regarding the role of India in the war, especially ways in which the conflagration would serve the purposes of altering the country's political status, appeared in the journal from October 1914. For example, "An Oxford Indian" argued that India was more than a bottomless well of mercenaries for the British to draw on. Rather, the country was 'fighting for a just and honourable and *equal* place in the Empire', and that 'young India sees in Indian loyalty this purpose'.[10] In December, the topic of political

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[7] A. E. R., 'Views and Reviews', ibid. vol.15/no.23 (1914), p.552.
[8] 'Thou art a God too, / O Galilean! / And thus singled-handed / Unto the combat, / Gauntlet or Gospel, / Here I defy thee!' ibid., pp.551–2.
[9] A. E. R., 'Views and Reviews', ibid. vol.15/no.24 (1914), p.576.
[10] An Oxford Indian, 'The Significance of India's Loyalty', ibid. vol.15/no.22 (1914), p.526.

rewards for Indian loyalty was revisited by Ananda Coomaraswamy.[11] He argued that Indians had no natural enemy in a European war, and that Indian sympathies primarily rested with the heroism of all the troops and all the various innocent victims of the war. Nevertheless, an Allied victory was the 'most desirable' outcome, and Coomaraswamy argued that, after the war, 'Austria should be disintegrated and Poland and Youga Slaviya [sic] new built; and we may hope that out of such a conflict may emerge a saner and more loving Europe ... we may expect that social revolutions will follow international bloodshed'.

Coomaraswamy's argument then shifted into a more philosophical and redemptive register regarding the future of the world. The war had highlighted 'a crisis in the history of Western culture', demonstrating the hypocrisy of Christianity, the errors of imperialism and, perhaps, even signalled the end of industrialisation. From this decadence, 'European culture is at the point of renewal', he maintained, for,

> since the Reformation, Europe has suffered from an undue exaltation of knowledge and a disvaluation of doing and feeling, but she has begun anew the education of her hands and heart. At the present moment her life and art are witness to the results of centuries of aimlessness; and the individualism and internecine warfare of the various activities of the mind are the diagnosis of the imperfection and discord of the modern European character. But a new age is in a process of development; after the war, Europe will enter upon a period of creative activity, the endeavour to realise in outward life the truths discovered in her age of criticism. This will be parallel to the Indian social evolution after the Upanishads and Buddha.

In response to this European crisis, India also had to undergo a national awakening. It needed to actively engage with the problems of the world in order to both gain its own freedom and play an active part in the profound renewal of the world's moral makeup. The war was nothing less than 'a universal *kultur-kamph*' from which a new era of humanity would emerge. India's primary asset was its development of 'the most profound philosophy

[11] An Anglo-Tamil, Ananda Coomaraswamy sought to blend Eastern and Western thought. Drawing on influences as diverse as William Morris, William Blake, Peter Kropotkin and Nietzsche, alongside Hindu and Buddhist writings, his modernist thinking identified a profound spiritual crisis in the west, and projected into the future a vision for fundamental renewal. For more see Roger Lipsey's two volumes of edited works, and especially his third volume of biography: *Coomaraswamy 3: His Life and Works* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977).

of the world', and the way this had been developed into 'a social organism, the Brahmanical theocracy'. Here was 'the science of peace'. European history, Coomaraswamy continued, had been misguided for three hundred years because its leaders had regarded the advice of 'artists, saviours and philosophers' as unpractical. When philosophers ruled over states and societies, however, a sense of overarching purpose could once again guide society, and the whole world could achieve 'well-being and enlightenment'. India had to help Europeans again find this sense of higher purpose, a reconnection with the transcendent; and in so doing, the country would 'rediscover her own inheritance'. He concluded that the 'evolution of a new humanity' was necessary, one that was 'at once national and international, a culture with widely varying local standards, but essentially the civilisation of all men, and the conscious creation of all'.[12] Interestingly, in terms of developing a nascent post-colonialism, Coomaraswamy's vision of western and eastern rebirth offered in a short compass a profound articulation of the sense of fundamental change that could come about during the war, arguing that India needed to become an active player in a new world order, one concerned with spiritual as well as political realities.

Oscar Levy also saw the need for a return to earlier religious sensibilities as the means to regenerate the future, as stated in his essay "Nietzsche and the Jews". Here, Levy argued that the Jewish understanding of community was superior to that which had been created by the historically far more recent concept of the nation-state: that 'which is presently called a "nation" in Europe', he stressed, 'is really rather *res facta* rather than *nata* – a thing made rather than born'. He also claimed that 'such "nations" should most carefully avoid all hot-headed rivalry and war!' Levy was clear on the point that Nietzsche believed that, though his ideal of the superman had not yet materialised, he regarded the Jews as 'the nearest, though imperfect, approach to it'. Levy continued this call for the redemption of Europe through this higher, racial spirit that, in his opinion, was possessed by the Jews, and claimed that the 'world still needs Israel, for the world is in a period of quick change and requires a centre around which the best of all nations may rally and recover'. The world 'has fallen a prey to democracy', he continued, and the 'terrible wars, of which the present one is only the beginning, are in store for it ... the world needs a race of good Europeans who stand above national bigotry and national hypocrisy'. Such a Jewish aristocracy, steeped in Nietzschean morality, could provide for the world the 'strongest spiritual guidance which is

[12] Coomaraswamy, 'A World policy for India', *The New Age* vol.16/no.8 (1914), pp.192–3.

to be had on earth', a message that 'can only be given by a strong and pure race, a race which has previous experience in guiding humanity and in deciding its good and evil, its right and wrong, its aim and direction'. Levy concluded by noting how Nietzsche's attacks on Judeo-Christian ethics stemmed from his concern with developing a higher morality, and that his critique of religion was the result of his intuition of true religion.[13] Again, a redemptive narrative is here couched in tropes of maximal modernist thought: the war was the epitome of the age of flux and crisis for Levy, and nations were not imbibed with the racial purity of the Jewish people (who themselves were also largely decadent). The resolution would be for Jews to return to their earliest, and allegedly most authentic, form of existence – 'the manly Jew, the warrior Jew under his kings, the Jew yet unbroken by the misery of later years', as he put it – in order to construct a new moral order for an age he believed to be profoundly adrift and, as a consequence, in global conflict.[14]

Another important contributor exploring the relationship between the war and the future of European society from early 1915 was the Basque intellectual, Ramiro de Maeztu. As a writer for *The New Age*, Maeztu was prolific. He developed his own maximal modernist critique of western European society, claiming that it no longer reflected a society structured according to a hierarchy of true values.[15] In short, his form of political modernism proposed that 'moral satisfaction', which for Maeztu meant the subordination of the freedom of the individual to abstract values such as justice, humility and strength, lay at the top of this hierarchy of social values. Yet aspects of a lower tier of values, concepts promoted by various aspects of political and economic liberalism, had recently asserted a level of power that undermined the sacrosanct 'moral satisfaction' of society. Consequently, he argued that society needed to be fundamentally re-ordered. For Maeztu, what was required was nothing less than total renovation of social solidity in order for it to once again chime with the morality of an earlier age, thus transcending a decadent modernity though the formation of an alternate one. This revolutionary shift would be marked by a radical move away from a culture promoting individualism, and towards a socio-political system ensuring that 'moral satisfaction' was not corrupted by liberal ideals manifesting too much power in the, purportedly subordinate, political and economic realms. During the war, Maeztu saw in the

[13] Levy, 'Nietzsche and the Jews, II', ibid. vol.16/no.8 (1914), pp.193–5.
[14] Levy, 'Nietzsche and the Jews, I', ibid. vol.16/no.7 (1914), p.171.
[15] Indeed, during the war he published a book based on his articles for *The New Age*, see: Ramiro de Maeztu, *Authority, Liberty and Function in the Light of the War* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916).

army a perfect model for creating such a new society, and fused these philosophical speculations with guild socialist theory in the pages of *The New Age*.[16] Maeztu's political philosophy, then, was clearly based upon what this study is describing as a 'palingenetic' dynamic. To elaborate these ideas in full would require an entire article or chapter of a book. Given the limited space of this survey and the complexity of Maeztu's vision, this chapter will not concern itself with parsing in detail his variant of nationalist socialism.

Writing in a very different idiom of cultural renovation, the numerous contributions to *The New Age* during the war by Ezra Pound also cannot be explored in depth here, primarily because they did not link a palingenetic vision directly to the course of the war. Nevertheless, in order to convey the richness and diversity of contributors to the journal, it is worth briefly highlighting how, in some of these articles, Pound can also be seen as a maximal modernist intellectual articulating ideas intended to shape the rebirth for western culture. From the beginning of January 1915, Pound contributed a series called "Affirmations"; in particular, an article entitled "Analysis of this Decade" captured the sense of European crisis and desire for a sense of modernist cultural rebirth. His argument claimed that 'only recently have men begun to combat the Renaissance', not in terms of extending the ideas of the counter-reformation, but because a fundamentally new approach to perceiving the world was coming into view. Artists like himself had 'begun deliberately to try to free ourselves from the Renaissance shackles, as the Renaissance freed itself from the Middle Ages'. The characteristics of this new art were epitomised most fully in the age of machines, of modernity, and this 'enjoyment of machinery is just as natural and just as significant a phase of this age as was the Renaissance "Enjoyment of nature for its own sake"'.

Similarly, reflecting the impact of global influences on cultural production, Pound believed that the recent impact of Chinese and Japanese cultures on the European sensibility 'cannot help but bring about changes as great as the Renaissance changes'. Unlike the Renaissance, which sought to rediscover 'a lost reality, a lost freedom', for Pound, the current cultural and political renovation sought 'a lost reality and a lost intensity'. The new aesthetic avant-garde, then, attempted a guiding programme which would combine the qualities of individualism and community, one that was 'in contradistinction to, but not in contradiction of, the individual impulse'. Concluding with a mechanical metaphor, Pound

[16] For more on Maeztu, see: Taylor, *Orage and The New* Age, pp. 76–90.

went so far as to suggest that this synthesis created a new form of consciousness, one forming the steam to drive the engine of a new age.[17] Such contributions thus chimed with the overarching tone of other articles in the journal, especially with respect to the need for a fundamental cultural renovation. They also reveal the diversity of views that can be placed under the banner of maximal modernism. His statements on the need for innovation and an epoch forming revolution in aesthetic styles tapped into the same underlying identification of modernity as decadence that also characterised guild socialist publicism, yet were clearly highly distinct from Orage and other guild socialists. The real enemies of both political and aesthetic modernism were those who respected the past to the point of rendering it inert. Further, like the guild socialists, Pound saw it as his task to encourage an active engagement with the past, especially its cultural production, which was capable of bringing a sense of radicalism to the present. This creative energy could then be harnessed to forge a fundamentally new future.

Meanwhile, from June 1915, Oscar Levy offered a series of five dialogues between two figures, dubbed "The German" and "The European", arguing that the causes of the war lay in the domination of Christian morality, and that it marked the beginning of a series of wars for the future of Europe. The drama in these articles centred upon the ways in which "The German" failed to grasp the wider historical and philosophical contextualisation presented by "The European", as "The German" essentially acted as the straight-man to the radical, Nietzschean assertions of "The European". The first article established that Germany was a particularly Christian nation, arguing this point through a Nietzschean lens so that the widespread take-up of socialism was seen as Christianity 'without a God'. Moreover, this growing faith in the state resulted in a 'State-Church' allowing for the German belief in national superiority. However, as a result of war, the world had reached a turning point where the decadence of Christian morality could be transcended.[18]

The second dialogue again picked up the theme of religion. "The European" argued that a virile religiosity was a masculine ideal, stating that 'there is no more manly occupation for thought than religion'; and also critiqued idealism of thinkers such as Kant – 'it is a short way from Kant to cant' – by arguing that one could either be idealistic and enslaved, or intelligent and free; Christian morality was the former, "The European's" ideal was the

[17] Pound, 'Affirmations. VI. Analysis of this Decade', *The New Age* vol.16/no.15 (1915), pp.409–11.
[18] Levy, 'The German and the European. A Dialogue', ibid. vol.17/no.8 (1915), pp.176–9.

latter.[19] The third of these dialogues developed the argument that democracy was a secularised variant of Christianity. In a very condensed narrative of historical cause and effect, "The European" elaborated this point thus:

> Without Christianity, there would have been no Protestantism, without Protestantism no liberty of conscience, without liberty of conscience no Republic of Geneva, without Geneva no Rousseau, without Rousseau no French Revolution, and without the Revolution no universal vote and no Democracy.

It was the failures of democratic institutions that had, in turn, led to the war, "The European" continued. Indeed, the decadence of the modern world was revealed in the ways in which the war quickly turned into a stalemate. It had become a vast symbol of the failure to cultivate 'great men' who alone were capable of the moral redemption of Europe. 'How else', "The European" asked rhetorically, could one explain why the continent was characterised by 'a dullness of the age, the absence of all stirring action, the universal paralysis of brains and hearts, the outrageous decay of character and will-power?'[20]

The subsequent article continued this theme, arguing that patriotic people were slaves to their nation. "The European", as a man committed to the truth, could not countenance patriotism, as it placed the good of the nation above the pursuit of 'truth'. Patriots were either actual or potential liars. Instead, "The European" regarded truly great men, such as Napoleon, as heroic figures who the masses should hold in awe. Their attempts to fuse Europe, not divide it into nations, were, of course, potentially unifying myths; the continent was in dire need of new great men, figures who aimed at nothing less than the reunification of Europe. The decadence of the age was explained in part because: 'For generations Europe has taken no notice of its higher men, that is to say, of those who are the guardians and the prophets and creators of divine truth'. Ignorance or misunderstanding of the likes of William Blake, Lord Byron, Heinrich Heine, and Nietzsche, alongside the growth of materialist atheism during the nineteenth century, played their part in the emergence of this culture, where unthinking patriotism and a 'moral muddle' dominated the divine truths

[19] Levy, 'The German and the European. A Dialogue, II', ibid. vol.17/no.12 (1915), pp.270–2.
[20] Levy, 'The German and the European. A Dialogue, III', ibid. vol.17/no.17 (1915), pp.399–401.

of poets and great men.[21] Levy's final article in this set tied these strands together by commenting most explicitly on the 'intellectual bankruptcy' and neglect of great men of the age, and its relationship with the war. 'This war', "The European" emphasised, '*is* the consequence of our contempt of the spirit, of our neglect of ideas ... If the world despises the spirit of great and good men ... it is no wonder that it stands in need of moral purification and spiritual regeneration'. In the final analysis, the war was a sign of the weakness of the age, not a war for national power. Levy aligned the mentality of Christianity with feminine qualities; the spiritual cure for the age was refracted through the lens of a muscular – and what was presented as a spiritually purifying – masculinity. Likewise, "The European" detailed how he had sensed the emergence of the war over the preceding years. As with Hobsbawm's metaphor of a gathering storm, "The European" claimed that he had felt the war as akin to a thunderstorm: he saw it as a violent tempest, one offering the hope of a fresh dawn after it passed:

> Suddenly the most terrific thunderstorm is upon us ... And now the sniff of fresh air ... The first signs of a change for the better ... The first ray of hope despite the gloomy skies ... you understand the tears of joy now? You understand that I am not a pessimist but an optimist, only an optimist with better reasons than you?

Indeed, war 'was the only way' for Europe to achieve this glimpse of a new sense of the transcendent, a 'sniff of fresh air':

> how could anyone go on living in such a stinking world! A world full of fat, bourgeois, screaming women, starving poor, revolutionary slaves led by decadent dynasts, mad reformers, and impotent talkers! A world without health and beauty, without spirit and courage, without true joy and without true grief. A world aiming at wretched comfort, at love and cotton-wool, at peace and happiness at any price. A world which had room for anyone, nursed everyone, pampered everyone, respected everyone, obeyed and honoured everyone – but hated and suppressed only one sort of being – a man. For such an age there is only one remedy and that is war, for it is

[21] Levy, 'The German and the European. A Dialogue, IV', ibid. vol.17/no.23 (1915), pp.541–544.

only in times of danger that a man can show his value, and thus war brings men to honour again...

Continuing this tirade, Lævy drew upon medical metaphors, claiming that 'war *is* a medicine, a cruel medicine, maybe, but the only one that promises a cure'. His final lines congratulated Germany for taking Europe into the war, a necessary act according to this view. The German aggressors were the 'physicians of Europe', who, in the long run, would cure Europe of its decadence. 'Europe is looking for new Masters', he concluded, 'and it will find them in the end'.[22]

Clearly, *The New Age* was able to host a wide range of non-guild socialist, maximal modernist views, as we have already seen. Indeed, the power of the model is its ability to allow researchers to align and contrast these diverse opinions, contextualising them within a common, wider mood of revolt against received values in order to elaborate a sense of renewal. Moving onto the maximal modernist publicism printed in the later period of the war, we will continue to see idiosyncratic views that were formulated from diverse intellectual perspectives.

1916 – 1919

Between late 1915 and early 1916, T. E. Hulme published two sets of essays. The former, "A Notebook" offered what was probably the most comprehensive survey of his developing modernist philosophy. This argued that a new order based upon Original Sin in morality, in addition to a move towards abstraction in aesthetics, was imminent. This was another variant on the idea of a classical revival, and Hulme directed his ire against almost all thinking that had occurred during and after the Renaissance. Nevertheless, a new era was emerging; a philosophy that, among others, drew on the thinking of Blaise Pascal, Henri Bergson, Wilhelm Worringer and Edmund Husserl. Hulme's second set of essays, "War Notes" were signed anonymously under the pseudonym "North Staffs". These engaged with the war, and were highly critical of certain aspects of the British army's conduct. The "North Staffs" articles also dismissed pacifism, for example debating alleged flaws with Bertrand Russell's version of the war. Meanwhile, Hulme described how 'every boundary in Europe, of political, social, intellectual and cultural importance, is at this moment in dispute, not of

[22] Lævy, 'The German and the European. A Dialogue, V', ibid. vol.17/no.26 (1915), pp.614–7.

argument alone, but of force; as the war subsides, so will these boundaries be left where it places them, to determine the *form* of Europe during the coming years of peace'.[23] Hulme's ideas have been well discussed elsewhere,[24] but clearly his thinking – heavily marked by tropes of decadence in the present, and rebirth for the future, alongside his attitude to the war as a liminal event – chimed with the pattern of maximal modernist thinking that could regard the conflagration as a vehicle for the emergence of a new era.

Hulme also published a translation of the Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* in 1916. Demonstrating the syndicalist influence on British intellectuals, the poet and founder of the journal *Arts and Letters*, Herbert Read, likewise contributed a pithy commentary on Sorel's thought in June 1916. Describing Sorel essentially as a social critic rather than a true political philosopher, Read argued that the Frenchman had exposed the ways in which capitalism had moved on since Marx's time, stymieing the potential for revolution. Read stressed the importance of two radical Sorelian ideas for ending 'our social decadence', especially useful when combating those reformers who simply attempted to ameliorate the worst aspects of capitalism, such as co-operative movements: firstly, the myth of the general strike evoking 'heroic virtue'; and secondly, proletarian violence. Regarding the latter, Read stated that it 'is for us to consider to what degree the present war will do the work expected by Sorel to be done by a general extension of proletarian violence'. His discussion argued that, on the one hand, the war was strengthening capitalist classes, yet, on the other, it was also imbuing the proletariat with a greater sense of mission and *esprit de corps*. The 'mob of the past', he claimed, 'will be the army of the future'. He also noted the shift in general mood, sensing that, as a result of the war, '[t]here has passed over us like a wave a grand revival of the sentiment of glory – a new realisation of heroic values'. Read concluded that, regarding the transcendence of capitalist decadence and the inauguration of an alternate modernity, 'the outlook is not one of despair ... the fatalistic revolution is in sight'.[25] This left-wing vision for a proletarian revolution was a long way from Levy's Nietzschean interpretation of the war.

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[23] North Staffs, 'War Notes', ibid. vol.18/no.2 (1915), p.29.

[24] See Michael Roberts *T. E. Hulme* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press Ltd., 1982); Leslie Susser, 'Right Wings over Britain: T. E. Hulme and the Intellectual Revolt against Democracy', Z. Sternhell (ed.), *The Intellectual Revolt Against Liberal Democracy, 1870 – 1945* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996) pp. 356 – 376; and Richard Schusterman 'Remembering Hulme: A Neglected Philosopher-Critic-Poet', in *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol.46/no.4 (1985) pp.559–576. For his collected writings, see: Karen Csengeri (ed.), *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[25] Herbert Read, 'Sorel, Marx and the War', *The New Age* vol.19/no.6 (1916), pp.128–9.

Elsewhere, this diversity of critiques continued. On example of this was a series of eight essays signed by "Kosmopolites", running from July to September of 1916, which inquired into the underlying societal mainsprings of the war. Early articles explored the ways in which European culture was one riddled with prejudices, and it was these divisive preconceptions that ultimately had led to the war. "Kosmopolites" identified the role of education, both at the level of school teachers and university professors, as the key figures in disseminating populist presumptions, constructing them in terms of skin colour, nation, or religious creed. Further, the media was highlighted as another major disseminator of prejudice, especially in the years immediately before the war. Referring to these discriminatory ideals, he claimed that the 'destruction of these monsters', which for "Kosmopolites" were essentially ideologies of power, 'if it could be brought about, would inevitably bring with it an amelioration of international relations'.[26] "Kosmopolites" then identified methods whereby the various rulers of the European nations – figures who did not themselves believe in these various populist prejudices – used them to their own advantage of selfish wealth-creation. For example, the article stressed how rulers had created an ideology of empire that served well the purposed of divide and rule, allowing leaders of the continent to dominate both European populations and global ones. However, as these were socially created ideas, not innate properties of collective human psychology, they could theoretically be destroyed. The final articles of the set augmented earlier claims that a peaceful future depended on a fundamental re-education of European society, albeit not primarily through the creation of new international institutions, such as the League of Nations. Though "Kosmopolites'" arguments were sceptical of a palingenetic shift in society as a direct result of the war, they nevertheless identified a profound failure in the liberal Enlightenment project. They were also informed by a highly idealistic vision of the continent's future, one that would see its inhabitants detached from the ideologies of race, religion and nationality perceived to be dividing Europeans. If such a revaluation were achieved, this would have marked a radical change, a revolution, in the value systems of the continent's population.

Also in terms of the negative consequences of Empire, the situation in Ireland was often discussed in *The New Age*, especially following the 1916 Easter Rising and its aftermath.

[26] Kosmopolites, 'War and its Makers, IV', ibid. vol.19/no.15 (1916), p.342.

One article penned by the poet, journalist and Irish ideologue, Æ,[27] in January 1918 demonstrates how the journal's publicism fused a modernist tenor with contemporaneous political issues such as the future of Ireland. The article argued that the idea of the country being divided into two competing races had, in fact, become erroneous. 'We should recognise our moral identity', Æ continued, stating that the style of politics pursued by both 'Ulstermen and Nationalists' was fundamentally distinct from elsewhere in Britain. Moreover, this nationalism was based upon the twin principles of blood and common mythology. Æ also argued that interbreeding had meant that, in the veins of all Irishmen, there now flowed 'the blood of the people who existed before Patrick', therefore, together, both Ulsterman and Nationalist could 'look backward through time to the legends of Red Branch, the Fianna and the gods as the legends of his people'. The invasions of Ireland by the British, he continued, 'however morally unjustifiable, however cruel in method, are justified by biology. The invasion of one race by another was Nature's ancient way of re-invigorating a people'.

Æ's Social Darwinism highlighted the idea that all civilisations operate 'in waves, that races rise to a pinnacle of power and culture, and decline from that, and fall into decadence', citing Flinders Petrie's *Revolutions of Civilisation* in support of this point. Invasion had stimulated renewed vitality, and this required a united and spiritually reborn Irish nation: 'We are a new people, and not the past, but the future, is to justify this new nationality'. Both the sense of common sacrifice in the war and the Easter rising were aspects of a national awakening, according to Æ, or, as the article phrased this point, they were instances of 'the modern Irish character just becoming self-conscious of itself'. He concluded by highlighting how, as a consequence of his Anglo-Irish identity, the Easter Rising had helped stir a sense of national unity in his outlook, and the article finished with a seven verse poem idealising the sacrifices being made in European battlefields, alongside those made by Pearse and other members of the Easter Rising. This concluded on a clear note of harmony:

> And to see the confluence of dreams
> That crashed together in our night,
> One river, born from many streams,

[27] For more on Æ, see: Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell "A.E."* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1975).

Roll in one blaze of blinding light.[28]

Highlighting the diversity of topics for debate within the journal, the issue of Ireland's future identity was yet another subject for maximal modernism to latch on to in *The New Age*.

Elsewhere, this diversity could be seen in émigré writers from eastern Europe. For example, writing in a prophetic, poetic and philosophical register, R. A. Vran-Gavran offered a series of articles on the need to fuse a pacific spiritualism that was derived from Christian teachings, alongside the wisdom of other religions, with the transcendent idea of mankind becoming regenerated through the creation of a divinely-inspired form of communism.[29] The first two essays on this highly esoteric topic, entitled "Ideals and Methods", elaborated the idea that fundamental changes could only occur if both one's ideals and one's methods for achieving these ideals were pure. His forecast was clearly marked by what this study has dubbed 'visionary pessimism', for example stating early on that: 'The existence of ideals has a double meaning: a poverty in the present and an abundance in the future. Our ideals are painful because they represent a burial feast of the present and birth agony of the future.'[30] The articles found that the model for the future was a man 'whose ideal and method are neither opposed nor separated from each other'. This vision for Vran-Gavran meant nothing less than 'the shaping of a new species of man, i.e., a new creation by good will instead of a forcible geological creation'.[31] Given these articles' poetic and prophetic register, they offered few details of what this new man would be like; rather, they lyrically discussed the idea that such a creative force would usher in a new era, and that it would be pure in both ideals and action. In the third article, "Modernism and Antiquism", Vran-Gavran lamented the use of religion as a justification for war (as was often currently the case), alongside the separation between what he distinguished as religion and knowledge. Such a description concluded with an appeal for a new generation not to recapitulate the decadence of the present, but to find a profound, new impulse. Turning to metaphor, he contrasted the flow of rivers with the inspiration of a spring, arguing that 'it is much easier to flow than to spring. Yet you can spring if you make an effort to plunge into the source of the life-river – which is everywhere deeply hidden – and bring back with you a new, clear wartercourse.' God, he stated, had

[28] Æ, 'New Ireland', *The New Age* vol.22/no.10 (1918), pp.187–9.
[29] For more on Vran-Gavran, a Russian monk, see: Martin, *The New Age Under Orage*, p.284.
[30] Vran-Gavran, 'Ideas and Methods', *The New Age* vol.22/no.22 (1918), p.433.
[31] Vran-Gavran, 'Ideas and Methods, II', ibid. vol.22/no.23 (1918), p.455.

retired from earthly matters, offering His creative powers to mankind alone. 'He', Vran-Gavran continued, 'is now looking at and waiting for a creative mankind to assume his own duty on Earth'.[32]

In the following article in the series, "Jesus the Carpenter", Vran-Gavran celebrated the figure of Christ, whose story and faith created a powerful sense of religious purity.[33] The final article, "Communism of the Saints", further outlined a communistic future based on sacred principles, claiming: 'Lo, the spirit of holiness is the best stone for the loftiest building of human organisation'. He critiqued Nietzsche's idea of the superman as a figure lacking the spiritual purity needed to redeem mankind from its present 'disharmony'. This was because interest in Nietzsche's superman figure cast an unwelcome shadow over the very aspects of the past that needed to be better understood. Vran-Gavran continued by stating that 'a new tale mankind needs, the yet untold, unapplied. It is the tale of the holy ones, the only superhuman ones that do not kill and drink blood'. It was necessary to look backwards to truly move forwards: 'The only sparkles of light in the past were the saints, killed by your shadow-casting superman ... From his tomb he warms the earth, stretching his hands through the shadows to meet the sun'. Such saintliness was precisely the quality lacking in the leaders of communism and revolutionary socialism, and ultimately the true communist question was 'a question of souls and not of codes'. Vran-Gavran concluded by asking if the next generation could be educated to become such saints 'If you say yes – yes, you are saved, and the world is saved, and a superhuman superhistorical, superindividual construction is coming to be'.[34]

From this endorsement of Christianity in the face of Nietzsche, an alternate émigré perspective came from, Janko Lavrin,[35] whose contributions included a discussion on the need for a wider understanding of tragedy in an article titled "The Tragic Individual". Here, Lavrin outlined a plan for true attainment and growth in life to first set about destroying the 'mechanical values, ideologies and "golden rules", which have been imposed a priori', a 'titanic task' requiring 'great spiritual honesty'. It was only figures achieving this state who could 'attain that creative idealism, the aim of which is not to mask reality but to transvalue

[32] Vran-Gavran, 'Modernism and Antiquism', ibid. vol.22/no.25 (1918), p.487.
[33] Vran-Gavran, 'Jesus the Carpenter', ibid. vol.23/no.1 (1918), pp.11–12.
[34] Vran-Gavran, 'Communism of the Saints', ibid. vol.23/no.5 (1918), pp.71–2.
[35] Lavrin was a prolific literary critic who was especially productive during the interwar period. His books addressed themes such as Russian literature, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and modernism. For more on Lavrin's thinking on Nietzsche, see: Janko Lavrin, *Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness* (London: W. Collins Sons and Co., 1922).

and transmute it consciously by the individual will'. He maintained there existed two types of idealism, the sentimental, romantic variant, as epitomised by *Candide*'s Dr. Pangloss, a personality incapable of creating the necessary transvaluation of values; and the tragic idealist who could see the world in all its nakedness, and therefore was uniquely capable of transforming reality. The greatest tragedy of the current era was that there existed no truly tragic figures, instead the present was a hedonistic epoch, one characterised by a distinct sense of 'spiritual poverty and decay'. At least with the war, Lavrin continued, many of the 'comfortable illusions have been destroyed ... many philistine ideologies have been drowned in blood. The naked reality showed its Medusa's head and changed one part of mankind into stone, another into beasts, another into heroes.' As a result, Lavrin concluded, 'it is possible that this total catastrophe of all our former values will give birth to the true transvaluer, i.e. to the tragic individual'. The war, according to Lavrin's deeply palingenetic longing, could be justified were it to generate a figure capable of redeeming a decadent era.[36]

After the war, reflecting on what the war meant for Europe in a Nietzschean register, Oscar Levy contributed a series of articles called "The Idolatry of Words", originally published in *La Revue Politique Internationale*, early in 1919. These articles presented the war as a result of Europe's descent into an enfeebled state. By 'weakening men', as the decadent, prewar world had achieved, Levy felt that, ultimately, such cultures 'do not turn their thoughts towards peace', but rather made people 'quarrelsome and vindictive ... Only the strong and healthy can remain at peace, provided they desire to do so'. Levy argued that, in principle, 'pæans of praise' should be sung to 'the dauntless Hercules who attacked this dungheap [i.e. prewar Europe]'. Yet sadly, in practice, there were no such heroes. The sacrifices by countless soldiers were a sign of their weakness and not of their heroic virtues. Indeed, the war effectively marked a failure by Europeans to cultivate their egos, their inability to direct them towards a 'higher' cause. 'It is this very point that the modern man had failed to grasp', Levy continued, 'he had entirely neglected to cultivate his ego; his desire for gain and mastery were no longer centred on any but base objects. When the war came, he was at once ready to sacrifice his ego, a fallow field, to the "sacred cause"'. This 'sacrifice through stupidity' had its ultimate roots in the morality of religion;[37] for Levy, the war was a symbolic failure in Christianity's code of ethics. For example, in the third of these articles,

[36] Lavrin, 'The Tragic Individual', *The New Age*, vol.22/no.26 (1918), p.503.
[37] Levy, 'The Idolatry of Words, I', ibid. vol.24./no.10 (1919), pp.160–1.

Levy grounded this point in a critique of Judeo-Christian morality that discussed at length what he dubbed the 'fiasco of the categorical imperative'. For Levy, this was an idea that could be traced back to 'decadent Judaism ("love thy neighbour") or, if you will, Christianity'. Kant's corrupted ideal had engendered a long period whereby Germans especially had denied themselves 'every effort towards happiness', creating a mass psychological 'suppression', resulting in 'a disease that can only be cured by violent reaction'. With the outbreak of the war, 'the strain became too great, the nervous system exploded, the categorical imperative was blown sky-high'. For Levy, this explained the much discussed and mythologised barbarism intrinsic to Germans, leading them to be conceived as criminals across Europe.

Further, given the fact that the war was, in Levy's opinion, a conflict between Christian moral principles and the secular religion of Teutonism, he suspected that:

> this war is a war of religion, in an up to date form. The world no longer believes in God, but does believe in Christian morality. Germany is endeavouring to establish and spread this morality through the agency of an organised state system: she is, in fact, the modern Church. Her enemies hate a church which they look upon as a dungeon for the imprisonment of men's consciences, and aim at the triumph of true Christianity, that is the individual freedom of sovereign peoples, no matter what the cost. The Church and the heretics are once more at daggers drawn, but with weapons of war more formidable than have ever been known before.

Any peace settlement would create an end to this condition in the short term. However, because it failed to grapple with the fundamental causes of the war, the conclusion to the hostilities would necessarily be a temporary one. The true spiritual undercurrents of the war were understood only by an enlightened few, those who aspired towards the development of a radically new form of morality adjusted to modernity, like Levy. Only such an intellectual vanguard realised the full extent of the decadence into which western society had descended. Without overcoming the spiritual antinomies of Judeo-Christian ethics, there could be no new era. The future, Levy concluded, would surely be beset by further wars of this type,

conflicts that, according to his thesis, were both symbolic and all-too-real expressions of moral weaknesses in modern humanity.[38] In his final article, he emphasised this last point:

> Such a peace could only come about through a katharsis, a universal purification of souls. The world must endeavour to free itself from its moral mysticism, which in Germany assumes a "State" form and elsewhere an "individualist" form ... But nothing is more difficult, nothing causes us more danger and loss of blood than this operation, which has to tear from our hearts a doctrine rooted there for thousands of years past.[39]

Conclusion

The main conclusion that we can take from this final survey of *The New Age*'s maximal modernist publicism is the range of diverse and competing views that could be established within the broad cultural zeitgeist that identified modernity with decadence and the potential for elemental change. Indeed, as we have seen, the diverse intellectual roots demonstrate a healthy and variegated culture within *The New Age* seeking to respond to this mood of the age. Aside from guild socialist debates, we have also found figures such as A. E. R. and especially Oscar Levy offering readings of the war through the lens of Nietzsche's philosophical modernism. Such a reading not only presented the conflagration as the epitome of a decadent morality, but typically included glimpses of hope for redemption in the form of a moral transvaluation of Judaeo-Christian ethics as well. Meanwhile, artists were developing modernist thought during the war in the journal. Ezra Pound's numerous essays offer just such an example of aesthetic modernism as a form of regeneration – a theme then promoted by the journal in the war years. Aside from aesthetic modernists, the journal additionally acted as a focus for the import of ideas by the likes of Ramiro de Maeztu alongside émigrés from eastern Europe such as Janko Lavrin and R. A. Vran-Gavran, the latter highly critical of the Nietzscheanism that Levy so enthusiastically developed within the journal's pages. In sum, between 1914 and 1918, highly diverse forms of modernist thought – that is, not just guild socialism – were disseminated in wartime Britain via the pages of *The*

[38] Levy, 'The Idolatry of Words, III', ibid. vol.24/no.14 (1919), pp.223–5.
[39] Levy, 'The Idolatry of Words, Concluded', ibid. vol.24/no.16 (1919), pp.260–1.

New Age. Indeed, the pages of *The New Age* are a perfect case study in this sense of diversity within the ideas that can be identified as maximal modernism.

Opposing Samuel Hynes' analysis, then, the first three chapters of this thesis have demonstrated that *The New Age* during the war is of far more interest to cultural historians than simply offering 'little more than a weekly review of the war'. Of course, many of its articles closely engaged with the flow of the war's events, but this was because, for its editor especially, the conflagration was the signal crisis of the modern era. It was the moment of *kairos* manifesting the opportunity for maximal modernist projections to redeem the supposed decadence of capitalist modernity. For some, it offered the opportunity to realise transcendence to a new order, a new modernity; for others it merely signalled the decadence of the age. Indeed, further detailed study of this remarkable journal might help redress the view traditionally espoused by cultural historians, such as Eksteins, that regards modernist thought as a phenomenon somewhat alien to British culture, especially when compared to continental radicals. To draw on Gramscian language, although the ultimate 'war of manoeuvre' for the emergence of a new modernity in Britain may have been far less successful than in other European countries, clearly disparate ideological and cultural 'wars of position' were attempted in the pages of *The New Age*. Many intellectuals tried to disseminate a maximal modernist sensibility that rejected bourgeois life and imagined a new form of existence in the journal's pages. By re-examining these debates throughout the war, we are offered a fascinating glimpse into the history of intellectual debate within Britain during the conflagration. Further, as the textual recovery process has been able to demonstrate, there is far more for historians to say about these debates that merely identifying their maximal modernistic qualities, and so the detailed representation of this thinking offered by this study has been able to reveal at least some of these important nuances. Yet clearly these diverse patterns of thought also sought to invest wartime modernity with a sense of transcendence in the face of readings of modernity as decadence. In so doing, although they offered highly variegated interpretations of contemporaneous events, they were also united by a key similarity that presented the war as an apocalyptic experience that potentially signified the end game of one world, and may have even led to the birth of another one.

Chapter 4: H. G. Wells' 'God the invisible king'

Having explored how a thriving, highly-diverse culture of maximal modernist thought found expression in the relatively esoteric realm of the pages of *The New Age*, this chapter turns our attention to one of Britain's most prolific and high profile wartime intellectuals, H. G. Wells. By moving away from the publicism of an esoteric Little Magazine and into the far more popular ideas of one of Britain's leading intellectuals, we will see once again the diversity of figures that can be placed within the maximal modernism model. Here, we will survey how Wells' unique intellectual roots and an idiosyncratic perspective on the crisis were synthesised into a form of maximal modernism during the war. Therefore, by examining Wells' literary output, which both before and during the conflagration comprised didactic fiction and futuristic non-fiction, we can locate and then explore within Wells' wartime oeuvre another unique instance of the First World War drawing out in a British intellectual maximal modernist tropes of pessimistic optimism, a sense of a profound rupture in historical time, and the desire for a new world to emerge from a decaying one. As with previous chapters, this exploration will not merely identify such maximal modernist tendencies but will analyse in detail the nuances of these ideas. Consequently, this chapter will present a new analysis of Wells' wartime writings, offering a detailed reconsideration of his wartime writings in the light of the maximal modernist model.

Currently, analyses of Wells' wartime work tend to either skim over or diminish the importance of his palingenetic message, one envisaging both personal and societal rebirth, which he developed during the war. Frank Field's *British and French Writers of the First World War* is an excellent example of this lacuna.[1] Among the specialist studies of Wells' oeuvre, probably the best discussion of his vision of an alternate modernity is offered by W. Warren Wargar's *H. G. Wells and the World State*, though it does not necessarily engage with the

[1] Field's study epitomises this failure to grasp the modernist dynamics of Wells' ideal of a world state unified under a new conception of God with comments such as: 'Because of his commonsense, his nineteenth-century attitudes and his essentially civilian and hedonistic world view, Wells was totally unfitted to understand the world of dictators'. See Frank Field, *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. pp.123–141. Though he was far from a brownshirt wearing Nazi, his apocalyptic and utopian concerns for a new world to emerge from the failures of capitalist modernity, alongside the nascent political religion that he developed and later dropped during the First World War, place Wells and totalitarianism in a common ideological strand of political modernism. For a more nuanced reading of the relationship between Wells' social and political thinking during the interwar period and the rise of totalitarianism see: Philip Coupland, 'H. G. Wells' "Liberal Fascism"', *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 35/no. 4 (2000) pp.541–558.

religiosity that Wells developed during the war,[2] which is one of the primary subjects of this chapter. Meanwhile, successive biographers including John Batchellor, Brian Murray, Michael Coren, Michael Foot, Vincent Brome, and David C. Smith[3] have failed to grapple sufficiently with issues surrounding Wells' religious ideas, themes that were so central to his propaganda work and his fiction alike during the war. Through an analysis of the texts he published during the war, this chapter will demonstrate the existence of a synergy between Wells' social and political writings and his fictional output, and will underscore how this work chimes with the heuristic model of modernist thought adopted by this study. Before focusing on Wells' wartime writings, it is worth revisiting some key areas of his prewar biography and publications in order to establish how Wells' fervent mind traversed the technological and ethical implications of modernity, from the *fin-de-siècle* period until 1914.

H. G. Wells, the guru of Edwardian modernity

As with A. R. Orage, the story of Wells' rise to prominence is characterised by class migration and the development of an idiosyncratic variant of socialism. Wells was born in 1866 to Joseph Wells, a shopkeeper based in Bromley, and Sarah Wells, a domestic servant, and later a housekeeper. In 1884, he secured entry into the Normal School of Science. In his first year, Wells thrived under Thomas Huxley's tuition, but soon realised that he was not suited to the rigours of in-depth scientific analysis. Increasingly, he skipped classes to read historical texts and works of literature, and, after attending a meeting at William Morris' home in Hammersmith, Wells became receptive to the concerns of socialism.

If we look at his first novella, *The Time Machine*, we find Wells attempting to rework the idea of the apocalypse in a modern, secular register. The Time Traveller's story reveals firstly the end game of the human species, then the end of earthly time itself. The human race's descent into decadence had stemmed from an embrace of what Wells would later describe as 'static' utopianism; it had failed to evolve dynamically to the ever changing conditions of life and had consequently withered into pleasure seeking human cattle and

[2] W. Warren Warger, *H. G. Wells and the World State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

[3] David C. Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Smith's biography offers one of the most sympathetic appreciations of Wells' wartime religious thought, but again he does not explore this development in any great depth or contextualise it within pan-European trends of wartime neo-religiosity. See pp.230–2.

cannibals.[4] Indeed, in subject matter, *The Time Machine* chimed with pan-European trends of a revolt against positivism, the articulation of a new sense of crisis and lack of stability regarding temporal categories, and the subversion of the idea of a steady progress towards better worlds in the future. Other 'scientific romances' before the war, such as *War of the Worlds* and *In the Shadow of the Comet* continued the exploration of this theme of apocalypse, often presenting a cataclysmic event ushering in a new, more spiritually aware, era for humanity. Indeed, this 'invention' of science fiction as a genre by Wells has allowed many writers to subsequently explore the antinomies of modernity and concerns regarding 'the future', and so this must be regarded as a major contribution to the literature of modernity in itself.

By the turn of the century Wells had also began to develop his books on 'Human Ecology'. Essentiality, these were speculative visions extrapolating the trends of modernisation into the future, sketching out an alternate modernity. To a largely rapturous reception in both Britain and on the continent, the first of these texts, *Anticipations*, was published in 1901. Early chapters predicted rapid advancement in existing technologies of transportation, and the extension of cities into vast conurbations covering most of the countryside. After this sketch of a new modernity, Wells arrived at the issue of agency regarding transition to the new era, deploying the idea of a cataclysmic war resulting from the antinomies of democracy as one potential event that would inculcate a paradigm shift in world affairs. The 'grey confusion of Democracy', he claimed, would 'pass away inevitably by its own inherent conditions, as the twilight passes, as the embryonic confusion of the cocoon creature passes, into the higher stage, into the higher organism, the world-state of the coming years'.[5] Wells also began to develop his idea of a revolutionary elite, a secret society of 'New Republicans', which subsequently became a recurrent trope in his writings. New Republicans were people that had become disillusioned with the *anomie* of capitalist modernity, and formed an 'open conspiracy' steering the world towards the new world state. The final chapter, "The Faith, Morals, and Public Policy of the New Republic", even sketched out the need for a new morality and a new religious sensibility.

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[4] For a detailed discussion of how Wells articulated a 'static' utopia in *The Time Machine* see John S. Partington, '*The Time Machine* and *A Modern Utopia*: The Static and Kinetic Utopias of the Early H. G. Wells' in *Journal of Utopian Studies*, vol.13/no.1 (2002) pp.57–68.

[5] H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1914) p.175.

Wells followed *Anticipations* with two more texts on Human Ecology, *Mankind in the Making* and *A Modern Utopia*, the latter probably remains the most well known of these writings. Here, Wells distinguished his vision of utopia from earlier idealised worlds, such as those forwarded by Plato, Moore, Campanella or Morris, by arguing these were essentially 'static', whereas his was 'kinetic'. An ever evolving vision of the future, his model was only one of what would be a series of alternate modernities, a 'hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages'.[6] Essentially, this utopia was a collectivised world state run by a massive bureaucracy based in France. Wells' alternate modernity foresaw the need to develop a powerful 'gardening state',[7] one weeding out undesirable elements and encouraging what he saw as the strong elements to grow. Consequently he also used the book to discuss his position on eugenics. Wells argued that the idea of killing mentally ill and criminal adults was morally wrong. Instead, he advocated measures for the prevention of the procreation of all the types of people that he considered undesirable to society. Regarding people in this 'descendent phase', he argued that 'the species must be engaged in eliminating them'.[8] With the exception of infants, this would not lead to mass executions: 'There would be no killing, no lethal chambers'. Rather, after some opportunity to redeem themselves, the exiles of utopia were to be housed on single sex islands, therefore unable to breed. In any event, this number would be dramatically reduced as there was no doubt that 'Utopia will kill all deformed and monstrous and evilly diseased people at birth'.[9]

Again, the trope of the emergence of a new elite that intuitively became aware of the need for a new order was strong throughout the book, especially in the chapter on the Samurai. In the parallel world, Wells talked of a Samurai class emerging from a series of cataclysmic wars, battles that had ushered in 'new and more permanent relations, that swept

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[6] H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005) p.11.

[7] The allusion is to Zygmunt Bauman's concept of the 'gardening state', a common theme of political modernism. Defending Wells' views from caricatured interpretation, John S. Partington has argued that scholars have sometimes over-emphasised his interest in the negative aspects of eugenics and euthanasia, taking the ideas expressed in *Anticipations* as Wells' final word on this topic, rather than seeking to understand how these ideas developed throughout his lifetime. See: John S. Partington 'The death of the Static: H. G. Wells and the Kinetic Utopia', *Utopian Studies* vol.11, no.2 (2000), pp.96–111, and John S. Partington, 'H. G. Wells's Eugenic Thinking of the 1930s and 1940s', *Utopian Studies* vol.14/no.1, (2003) pp.74–81. For a good example of Wells' interest in eugenics and euthanasia being judged harshly, we can turn to John Carey, who has argued inaccurately that Wells wanted the subjugation and even the elimination of non-white races. See John Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880 – 1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992) ch.6 and 7.

[8] Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, p.96.

[9] Ibid. p.100.

aside obstructions, and abolished centres of decay'.[10] Here, Wells also divided humans into four types – kinetic, poetic, dull and base. The Samurai were made up of the kinetic type, while poetic people had some input regarding the running of the world. Samurais all held key administrative positions in the World State, and comprised a new 'voluntary nobility' who were committed to follow 'the Rule', described as a set of strict codes designed to 'keep all the Samurai in a state of moral and bodily health and efficiency'.[11] The Samurai also possessed a sacred book, and were forced to go alone on a pilgrimage once a year to keep their faith in the new moral system underpinning the World State. The idea of God that gripped the Samurai, he continued, was not found in organised collective worship and theological dogma, but in a deeply personal relationship between man and God.[12] The book ended with the narrator returning to the realities of Edwardian London and suddenly being struck with a call for a revolutionary consciousness whilst sitting on a bus 'lumbering up Cockspur Street':

> Could one but realize an apocalyptic image and suppose an angel, such as was given to each of the seven churches of Asia, given for a space to the service of the Greater Rule! I see him as a towering figure of flame and colour standing between earth and sky, with a trumpet in his hands, over there above the Haymarket against the October glow; and when he sounds, all the samurai, all who are samurai in Utopia, will know themselves and one another.[13]

The problem with this vision of a secular judgement day and new birth, as Wells later reflected in his autobiography, was that his 'Theory of Revolution by Samurai hung in the air' and that he 'could not discover any way of bringing it down to the level of reality'. Here, Wells also compared his idea to Lenin's Communist Party in that both possessed an 'arrangement whereby a man or woman could be a militant member of the organization and then drop out of its obligations and privileges', both imposed 'special disciplines and

[10] Ibid. p.176.
[11] Ibid. p.188.
[12] Ibid. pp.201–2.
[13] Ibid. p. 244.

restrictions on the active members', and both insisted 'upon a training in directive ideas as part of the militant qualification'.[14]

Aside from these texts, Wells had been a member of some of Britain's key political institutions of the period, including the Reform Club and the Coefficients Club. He was also a member of the Fabian Society from 1903 onwards. As with Orage, the radicalism that Wells had been developing sought a more poetic vision of societal renewal than the austere, rational socialism that was offered by the Fabians, and by 1908 Wells had resigned from the society. In a last hurrah to convert younger Fabians to his ideas, 1908 saw Wells publish *First and Last Things*, a series of lectures intended to be a candid appeal to potentially more radical, younger Fabians rather than the moderation of the 'Old Gang'. In this work, we again find tropes of criticism of the positivism of science, and the need to discover what he dubbed a 'kinetic' sense of life as opposed to 'static' logic.[15] Wells also described how all of mankind had emerged from a common blood ancestry. By accepting this idea, one came to the realisation of the existence of an overarching, communal mind of humanity. By working towards awakening the consciousness of this communal mind, one could begin to find religious salvation and even love, alongside an awareness of being an instance of what he would later dub the 'Collective Mind', thereby transcending the 'egoism' of individuality.

As a result of his successes as a novelist, alongside his Human Ecology, Wells had become a genuinely international figure prior to the outbreak of war, and had published in America and in translation on the continent. Clearly, by 1914 Wells' interests in the dynamics of modernity were multifaceted. He reacted to a sense of decadence in capitalist modernity in a political and cultural sense, though he did not channel this into an experimental new aesthetic form of the type typically associated with literary modernism. Indeed, in his writing style, he preferred the accessibility of realism, and therefore popularity, over esoteric experimentation. Nevertheless, according to the maximal modernist model Wells should be considered a modernist as his ideas often expressed the need to think beyond a steady sense of liberal-democratic progress towards a better world, championing change through a cataclysm and through the agency of a revolutionary, morally superior elite. Indeed, many of these themes were articulated with a farsighted accuracy in early 1914, when he published

[14] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1866) Volume II* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) pp.662–3.
[15] H. G. Wells, *First and Last Things: A Confession of Faith and Rule of Life* (London: Watts and Co. Ltd., 1929) p.21.

The World Set Free. This novel, set in 1950s, prophesised a war between the 'Central Powers', primarily Germany, and the 'Free Nations', including Britain and France. Here, Wells deployed the idea of the nuclear bomb as the futuristic device that would destroy swathes of mainland Europe, and in so doing would convince the world of the need to usher in a new era governed by a pacific World State that would be erased of capitalism. A new spirit characterised the era after this nuclear war which was religious, though not Christian, altruistic not egotistical, morally regenerated, and awakened to a new collective consciousness. As we will see, Wells' futural vision was different from those we have thus far encountered, eschewing both Marx and Nietzsche. The remainder of this chapter will reveal the nuances of how Wells' idiosyncratic political views and fiction drew on the wider crisis of the war.

The First World War and Wells' non-fiction writings

Despite Wells' repeated descriptions of a European war, the outbreak of the conflict in 1914 came as a genuine shock. 'I let my imagination play about it', he claimed in later years, 'but at the bottom of my heart I could not feel and believe it would really be let happen'.[16] In his autobiography, he stated that 'no intelligent brain that passed through the experience of the Great War emerged without being profoundly changed. Our vision of life was revised in outline and detail alike ... it was the revelation of the profound instability of the social order.' He also claimed that it uncovered 'possibilities of fundamental reorganisation' and a weakness in the 'collective mentality' of mankind.[17] Indeed, Wells argued throughout the war that new international systems of government were needed, a new map of Europe was required, and even a new way of conceiving of God was essential, in order to unite people in the new age that was emerging from the carnage.

His first book on the war was published in 1914, and comprised of a series of essays written in August for the *Daily Chronicle*, *The Nation*, *The Daily News* and *The War Illustrated.* Titled *The War that Will End War*, the book not only coined one of the key slogans of the era, but also emphasised how Wells saw the conflagration as a part of a dialectical process that could result in the emergence of a new epoch of historical reality. From this text we can see

[16] Norman and Jean MacKenzie, *The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974) p.298.
[17] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, p.666.

that, from the outset, Wells regarded the fighting as 'the vastest war in history', that it was 'a war not of nations, but of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world-madness and end an age'.[18] Moreover, he believed that every 'fighter who fights against Germany now is a crusader against war. This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war – it is the last war!'[19] Essays' topics ranged from the origins of the conflagration to the distribution of food in Britain under the new conditions; compared the differing geopolitical threats of a modernised Russia against the aggression of Germany; and discussed calls for American intervention. He further demanded an end to the private trade in arms: 'That is the real enemy', he stated, regarding 'the evil thing at the very centre of this trouble'.[20]

We also gain from these early war writings a sense of the project that Wells already hoped would shape the future peace. For example, in the article "The Need of a New Map of Europe", Wells argued that the continent could 'begin a new period of history'[21] by attempting to redistribute its lands in a more 'just' division. France would recover Lorraine, and Alsace could either become linked with France or the Swiss Confederation. Trieste, Trent and possibly Pola should be returned to Italy, the Austrian Empire should be disbanded and a new confederation, similar to Switzerland, should be constructed to unite the Slavic peoples. Bulgaria should gain lost land from Serbia, and Romania should be given Transylvania. Poland would become a united country in Wells' new Europe, although it would retain the Tzar as its head of state. The need for this new map was vital, for failure to fundamentally recast the idea of Europe would lead to 'a new set of ugly complications and prepare a still more colossal Armageddon than this that is now going on'.[22]

In the following essay, "The Opportunity of Liberalism", Wells continued his idiosyncratic approach to reordering the world. 'Never did any time carry so swift a burden of change as this time', he announced, and, demonstrating his belief that the war was driving elemental change, stated that it 'is manifest that in a year or so the world of men is going to alter more than it has altered in the last century and a half, more indeed than it ever altered before these last centuries since history began'.[23] He emphasised that the stable national borders of Europe before the war now 'waver under one's eyes', and ideas 'that have ruled

[18] H. G. Wells, *The War That Will End War* (London: Frank and Cecil Palmer, 1914) p.9.
[19] Ibid. p.11.
[20] Ibid. p.37.
[21] Ibid. p.47.
[22] Ibid. p.52.
[23] Ibid. pp.55–6.

life as though they were divine truths are being chased and slaughtered in the streets'.[24] Property and individualism had become concepts of a previous age, 'leaving socialism and Collectivism in possession. The state takes over flour mills and food supply, not merely for military purposes, but for the general welfare of the community ... There is not even a letter to the *Times* to object'.[25] Collectively, such changes marked an elemental breakdown of the prewar social structure, fundamentally subverting its institutions and social conventions. These 'crumble about us, and release unprecedented power to the two sorts of rebel that ordinary times suppress, will and ideas'. Indeed, 'will' and 'ideas' would 'take a larger part in this *swirl*-ahead than they have even taken in any previous collapse'; and the 'desire for a new world of definite character' would become 'a guiding force' for 'shaping the new time'.[26] Further, many liberals failed to realise that 'the individualist capitalist system' was now 'helpless', and that a 'new economic order may be improvised and probably will in some manner be improvised in the next two or three years'.[27] The questions, then, were stark. Would the 'the new world' be 'shaped by the philosophers or the Huns'? And 'shall we be able in this vast collapse or re-birth of the world, to produce ideas that will rule?'[28] He concluded on the need for a world conference to decide the terms of the peace, and for a Peace League to 'control the globe', alongside the elimination of private industry. Each of these themes would be developed further throughout the war.

The final essay, "The War of the Mind", offered a clearer impression of how Wells conceived his role as an 'organic intellectual' during the war. 'We fight not to destroy a nation', he stated, 'but a nest of ideas'.[29] Ultimately, then, this was a war of hegemonic beliefs: 'Our business is to kill ideas. The ultimate purpose of war is propaganda, the destruction of certain beliefs and the creation of others. It is to this propaganda that reasonable men must address themselves.'[30] He went on to argue that governments tended to be uncreative, to only 'follow necessity'. Consequently, it rested 'with us who, outside all formal government, represent the national will and intention, to take this work into our hands ... we have to create a wide common conception of a re-mapped and pacified

[24] Ibid. pp.57– 8.
[25] Ibid. p.58.
[26] Ibid. p.59.
[27] Ibid. p.61.
[28] Ibid. p.60.
[29] Ibid. p.90.
[30] Ibid. p.91.

Europe, released from the dangers of a private trade in armaments, largely disarmed and pledged to mutual protection'.[31] He then concluded the chapter with a discussion on the failure of Christianity to prevent war, to offer moral leadership, and to provide a rationale towards a new peace. All public figures, both religious and political, who had called for peace but provided no clear conception of how to achieve it were impotent in Wells' eyes. What is more, Wells called on religious figures to become politicians if their calls for peace were to be meaningful.

Wells published several pamphlets during the war, and these contain further details on how he conceived the war crisis leading to a new era in world affairs. For example, the 1916 pamphlet *The Peace of the World* discussed the contradiction that the war was creating in the hearts of the combatant nations. As he put it, 'every man is divided against himself' because, on the one hand, everyone wanted peace, yet, on the other, there

> is a sensation of greatness, a beautiful tremendousness, in many of the crude facts of war, they excite in one a kind of vigorous exultation; we have this destructive streak in us, and it is no good pretending that we have not; the first thing we must do for the peace of the world is to control that.[32]

Running with this point, the pamphlet discussed the need for destructive aspects of the human mentality to be controlled to contain the growth of ideologies of hatred. Again, he underpinned his demand for a 'World Congress' after the war, and discussed the need for America to be engaged in this forum. Wells also concluded that intellectuals should not wait until this council met after the war to ferment an ideology articulating the 'possibilities of a World Congress and the establishment of world law and world peace that lie behind the monstrous agonies and cruelties and confusions of this catastrophic time'. His reasoning was classically that of an 'organic intellectual', claiming that given 'an immense body of opinion initiatives may break out effectively anywhere'.[33] Another pamphlet, *The Elements of Reconstruction*, continued this propaganda effort, arguing for the need to use the profound crisis of the war as a catalyst to transcend what he here described as the 'Selfish Age',

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[31] Ibid. p.94.
[32] H. G. Wells, *The Peace of the World* (London: Daily Chronicle, 1916) p.12.
[33] Ibid. p.64.

characterised by piecemeal reforms lacking an underlying guiding idea and the pursuit of profit by capitalists. Here, he sketched out how Britain's agricultural and industrial economies could be controlled by national trusts, and frictions in labour relations could be eliminated. Interestingly, this discussion of labour politics also contained a section engaging with the issue of guild socialism. He praised the ideology for politicising the working classes and suggesting a move towards a form of collectivised ownership, that it was 'preparing the minds of large masses of workers for industries on a national scale'[34] as he put it. However, he critiqued the way the ideology was predicated upon the Marxist idea of class warfare. Indeed, we can see clearly that Wells was eager to put some clear blue water between himself and other radical left-wing thinkers of the period, again highlighting the diversity of opinion within maximal modernist positions.

In 1916, Wells also released a book reprising his Human Ecology called *What is Coming? A Forecast of Things after the War*, comprising articles published in *Cassell's Magazine*, *The Daily Chronicle*, and *The Daily News* between January and May 1916. From the opening chapter on, he argued for the need for more professionalism in the drive towards a permanent peace. According to Wells, this movement needed to harness the new found freedom 'from the habitual and selfish' brought about by the crisis of the war. Reworking his theory of an elite emerging to redeem a decaying era, he continued by stating that in wartime an 'intense religiosity, of devotion and of endeavour are let loose', and that in the near future 'there will be much more likelihood that we may presently find, what is impossible to find now, a number of devoted men and women ready to give their whole lives, with quasi-religious enthusiasm, to this great task of peace establishment'.[35] In the first two chapters, he predicted that the war would end not through some final breakthrough and total defeat of one side, but rather due to a slow process of exhaustion, arguing it would be Germany and her allies who would fall prey to it first. Peace would be negotiated between three major world power groups, the pan-Americans, Germany and her allies, and the anti-German allies, the latter two exhausted by the war years. By uniting these groupings under a common agenda, a World State could emerge.

Regarding postwar Britain, Wells predicted that the wartime conditions would act as a catalyst for a new ethos and spirit amongst the youth of Europe in opposition to 'our

[34] H. G. Wells, *The Elements of Reconstruction* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1917) p.68.
[35] H. G. Wells, *What Is Coming? A Forecast of Things after the War* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1916) p.22.

ostensible rulers and leaders [that] have been falling behind the times'. This new spirit, then, would save Britain and other European countries from the stilted nature of political leadership that had characterised the prewar era. He defined this new mood as 'the creative spirit as distinguished from the legal spirit', further, 'it is the spirit of courage to make and not the spirit that waits and sees and claims; it is the spirit that looks to the future and not to the past'. For Wells, this attitude even had religious qualities in the form of a 'thinking back to oneself from greater standards and realities'.[36] Like many radical intellectuals across Europe, Wells also thought the trenches themselves could ferment and found a new type of mindset. For at least two decades following the war, he continued, all areas of British life would be impregnated with a new figure: 'he is young and he is uniformed in khaki, and he brings with him a new spirit into British life, the spirit of the new soldier, the spirit of subordination to a common purpose'.[37] Further, with regard to the next generation of legal minds, he argued that in 'the British trenches now there must be many hundreds of fine young lawyers, still but little corrupted, who would be only be too glad' to swap a career as a lawyer 'for lives of service and statecraft'.[38] Wells also developed his idea of a new map for Europe, and argued that, alongside the political map of the continent, there existed 'natural maps of mankind', which were more permanent than individual rulers but were not eternal and unchanging features of human reality.[39]

In his discussions on the prospects for socialism during and after the war, Wells echoed other radical intellectuals, such as Orage, in calling for the conscription of property. He also praised the increased collectivisation of the national economy: 'There is a new economic Great Britain to-day, emergency made, jerry-built no doubt, a gawky, weedy giant who may fill out to such dimensions as the German national system has never attained. Behind it is an *idea*, a new idea, an idea of the nation as one great economic system working together.'[40] It was certainly in Britain's best interests to keep on building this ideal of a 'great national factory' after the war, and central to any such permanent transition to this style of economy was to establish transparency in the politics of the nation's economic affairs, thereby ending the distrust between working and managing classes. According to Wells,

[36] Ibid. p.91.
[37] Ibid. p.148.
[38] Ibid. p.135.
[39] Ibid. p.190–216.
[40] Ibid. p.113.

failure in this regard was now the 'darkest shadow upon the outlook of European civilisation at the present time'.[41] The Europe of 1930, he speculated, would still see much of the capitalist system in place, but key areas of the economy, such as shipping, railways, coal, metal industries, large quantities of engineering, and the majority of the agricultural sector would already have come 'more or less completely under collective ownership, and certainly very completely under collective control'.[42]

He followed up this book with *War and the Future.* Published in 1917, it consisted of new material alongside essays from *Cassell's Magazine*, *The Daily Chronicle*, and *The Daily News* printed in late 1916. Though much of the book comprised of reportage of his journeys in Europe during August and September 1916, including the war in Italy and in France, Wells also began to develop more clearly what this study regards as his maximal modernist sense of the transcendent, a view that regarded the war as an event symbolising a profound break with the past and capable of drawing out across Europe radically novel, less individualistic and more spiritual understanding of man's place in the universe. The opening chapter, "The Passing of the Effigy", critiqued the worship of 'effigies', supermen figures and singular, supposedly great leaders such as the Kaiser. With the outbreak of the war, Wells argued that it 'seems that the twilight of the half gods must have come, that we have reached the end of the age when men needed a Personal Figure around whom they could rally'.[43] He also claimed that he was becoming more aware of a religious belief grounded in the conviction that 'mankind is still as it were collectively dreaming and hardly more awakened to reality than a very young child'. Nationalism was a characteristic feature of this dream state, as were its various effigies. The 'time draws near', he continued, 'when mankind will awake and the dreams will fade away, and then there will be no nationality in all the world but humanity, and no king, no emperor, no leader but one God of mankind'.[44] From this position, he found that he could even dismiss Nietzsche as a mystic who worshiped the dated concept of the effigy in the form of his Übermensch figure. Again, we can see some fundamental differences between Wells and earlier thinkers such as Orage and Levy, for whom Nietzsche was an important intellectual hero.

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[41] Ibid. p.117.
[42] Ibid. p.123.
[43] H. G. Wells, *War And The Future: Italy, France and Britain at War* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd. 1917) p.28.
[44] Ibid. pp.27–8.

Wells characterised the actual fighting in depressing, unheroic tones. Modern warfare was based on a series of blunders, one army achieved a breakthrough due to the experimental nature of modern warfare leading to its opponents making mistakes – armies lost battles rather than won them. What is more, he claimed that while the nature of war had undergone a significant transformation over the previous twenty-five years, many of the military leaders had failed to adjust to these new conditions and technologies. These advancements had made the sustained nature of modern, industrialised warfare an option viable only to a handful of heavily industrialised countries, namely: Britain, France, Germany and the USA – while Japan, Italy, Russia and Austria were also capable of sustaining modern warfare to a lesser extent. Consequently, it was now in the hands of these powers that all future wars lay, they would either be fought by them, or with the backing of one or more of these states.[45] Portending the later Security Council principle of the United Nations, according to Wells by uniting these nations an organisation could be created that would act as the custodian of a world peace, and the book ended with a further discussion of how the peace was to be managed. The duties of this League of Peace would include limiting all arms production to help prevent warfare, and hosting an International Tribunal for settling international disputes. The Tribunal should also have powers to intervene in national governments' tariffs and other legislation affecting international relations and 'commercial warfare' in order to maintain the peace.[46] Also, an International Boundary Commission would seize on the opportunity 'such as the world may never have again of tracing out the 'natural map' of mankind'. He continued that it was the responsibility of America to step forward and offer its backing to such international institutions, and claimed that it would potentially be 'a world settlement made primarily to establish a new phase in the history of mankind'.[47]

In the third section of the book, "How People Think About the War", Wells reflected again on the wider repercussions of the conflagration on the British and European psyche. For the most part, he argued, Europeans had failed to grapple with the overarching implications of the war, that people were overwhelmed by the new spectacle of battle, such as exploding shells or burning zeppelins. They could not see the event in its historical, epic

[45] Ibid. p.177.
[46] Ibid. pp.275–7.
[47] Ibid. p.287.

context. Pacifists and conscientious objectors also came under fire, and Wells argued that many were motivated by an alienation from a sense of communal consciousness. Aside from an honourable few motivated by religious impulses, such as Quakers, most conscientious objectors opposed the war in order to play out the role of the rebel, and lacked a sense of community. Indeed, in a subtle critique of the lack of social cohesion created by modernity, Wells even argued that, given the way modern industrial societies produced such atomised communities, the Allied nations 'have not got nearly all the conscientious objectors they deserve'.[48]

Running throughout the book, and especially in its final chapters, was a strong critique of organised religion, alongside the hope for a new model for religion to emerge from the war. Wells always opposed the structured aspects of faith, and expressed this idea again in a chapter titled "The Religious Revival": 'Organisation is the life of material and the death of spiritual processes',[49] he claimed, arguing that real sins were being committed by members of organised religions. Specifically, this was because they preached the national cause over the universal ideal of religion, 'the sin of national egotism and the devotion of men to loyalties, ambitions, sects, churches, feuds, aggressions, and divisions', he argued, 'are an outrage upon God's universal kingdom'.[50] Wells also asserted that the new international arrangements, which he believed would emerge from the war, needed to offer people a sense of a greater order, giving them 'a leadership and reference outside themselves'. This necessitated a religious dimension, which, he continued, 'is why I assert so confidently that there is a real deep religious movement afoot in the world'.[51] He concluded the book by claiming that the future needed to manifest 'the Kingdom of God over a world-wide system of republican states' because this was 'the only possible formula under which we may hope to unify and save mankind'.[52]

Wells' next book, *God the Invisible King*, was devoted to the in-depth discussion of the nature of the modernist religion that he imagined should supersede all previous religious structures, and that he believed was emerging spontaneously during the war. This concern with religiosity was fundamentally different from the maximal modernist thinking so far

[48] Ibid. p.202.
[49] Ibid. p.211.
[50] Ibid. p.215.
[51] Ibid. p.224.
[52] Ibid. p.297.

encountered in this study, and it epitomises the uniqueness of Wells' wartime thought. Indeed, many critics tend to be dismissive of this development in Wells' oeuvre. For example, in a reductive piece of analysis in his *Shadow of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy*, Patrick Parinder describes this aspect of Wells' oeuvre as 'wayward' and 'spurious'. In so doing, he entirely misses the point that these ideas furnished Wells with an important conceptual structure that offered a unifying vision for the redemption of the new world that he believed would emerge from the crisis of the war. *God the Invisible King* was itself a work influenced by discussions Wells had with prominent atheist friends of the era, such as Gilbert Murray and Joseph McCabe.[53] The book made an impact on pro-war American Christians in 1917,[54] and sparked debate in Britain. For example, William Archer critiqued the concept although he was supportive of some of Wells' overarching aims;[55] and after the war the vicar of Christ Church, Plymouth critiqued Wells' ideas more strongly.[56] The preface made clear that he was not interested in simply re-working Christianity, but rather his vision was concerned with 'a profound belief in a personal and intimate God',[57] and that it was imperative to clear previous religions 'out of the way at this present time of exceptional religious need'. He defined the tone of the book as 'missionary', and claimed that he was 'zealous to liberate' and was 'impatient with a reverence that stands between man and God'.[58] He took special issue with the notion of the Trinity, and argued that this had little to do with the teachings of Jesus *per se*, rather, it was an *ex post facto* construct arising from the First Council of Nicaea which had forwarded a conception of God that suited the needs of creating an organised Church, but stymied true religious knowledge.

Here, Wells also introduced a binary between what he called 'God the Creator' and 'God the Redeemer'. The former was a 'Veiled Being' a figure who created the universe and was unknowable to the mind of mankind, the latter, 'the God in our hearts', was the being that he was primarily concerned with. This focus freed him from making speculative statements on the ultimate origins of the universe, allowing him to concentrate on what he

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[53] David C. Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) p.231.
[54] Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Washington: ISI Books, 2003) pp.163–6.
[55] William Archer, *God and Mr Wells* (London: Watts and Co. 1917).
[56] L. E. Binns, *Mr Wells' Invisible King: A Criticism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919).
[57] H. G. Wells, *God the Invisible King* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1917) p.v.
[58] Ibid. p.vi – vii.

viewed as the essentials of a religious temperament.[59] Echoing his critique of effigies in *War and the Future*, Wells was clear in his opening chapter that the 'renascent religion that is now taking shape, it seems, has no founder ... it is the Truth, its believers declare'.[60] Nevertheless, 'God the Redeemer' was what Wells described as a finite God, a being that 'exists or strives to exist in every human soul'; and 'he has an aim and that means he has a past and a future; he is within time and not outside it'.[61] Wells' conception of 'God the Redeemer', then, formed a spiritual bridge between eternal spiritual truth manifest in 'God the Creator' and the finite realm of everyday human consciousness.

Wells claimed that the experience of this connection with a 'higher' realm underpinning his modernist religion had been described most accurately by William James, and ran as follows. Following what Wells called 'an initial state of distress with the aimlessness and cruelties of life, and particularly with the futility of the individual life ... [an] inability to form any satisfactory plan of living' – in other words a sense of crisis and *anomie* – this sense of a nomic crisis could be resolved when 'in some way the idea of God comes into the distressed mind, at first simply as an idea, without substance or belief'. For Wells, this intellectual recognition of God was often resisted, and, echoing his own ideas before the war of the idea of a racial collective consciousness, the initial stages of conversion to God as an 'invisible king' according to Wells could be characterised thus: 'he is spoken of preferably by such phrases as the Purpose in Things, as the Racial Consciousness, as the Collective Mind'. However, if this new sense of faith was worked on, such naïve concepts that groped towards God, but failed to describe him accurately, could be overcome, and Wells' 'God the Redeemer' would become evident. The resulting maximal modernist moment of *kairos* revealing a new faith felt as if 'one was touched at every point by a being akin to oneself, sympathetic, beyond measure wiser, steadfast and pure in aim'. One realised that 'God is with us and there is no more doubt in God'.[62] Elsewhere, Wells syncretised other religious models into his modernist sense of the transcendent, arguing that like Buddhism, the modern religion was not concerned with offering immortality, but rather was conceived as an 'escape from the self centred-life and over-individuation'.[63]

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[59] Ibid. p.xiii.
[60] Ibid. p.2.
[61] Ibid. p.6–8.
[62] Ibid. p.25–8.
[63] Ibid. p.87.

In the chapter "Heresies", we were given some details on what Wells' vision of God was not. He argued that it was essential not to be over speculative, and people must not use the religious temperament to exaggerate the realm of God's powers. For example, faith in God did not allow for the belief in magic, and Wells highlighted this point by critiquing the claims of some within the Anglican clergy that God was even influencing the weather to help the British defeat Germany. Another quality that God did not possess was providence. Though He would always be 'with' his believers, Wells stated that 'God does not guide our feet'. Further, belief in God discouraged quietist attitudes and inaction, the 'finding of God is the beginning of service', he argued, 'it is the release of life and action from the prison of the mortal self'. Therefore, the 'peace of God comes not by thinking about it but by forgetting oneself in him'.[64] Wells' God was also not a fear inducing deity, and he critiqued Christian theologians who attempted to use the terror of God's anger as a means to convert children, an experience which he stated had prevented him from believing in God for many years. Finally, God was not concerned with enforcing a particular sexual morality, the 'detailed interpretation of that "right" is for the dispassionate consideration of the human intelligence'.[65]

To counterpoint this list of what God was not, his chapter "The Likeness of God" offered some further insights into His nature. Primarily, 'God is Courage', Wells emphasised – a statement often repeated in his war fiction. Secondly, Wells claimed that 'God is a person who can be known as one knows a friend, who can be served and receive service, who partakes of our nature; who is, like us, a being in conflict with the unknown and the limitless and the forces of death'. God was helpful to his believers, and valued 'much that we value and is against much that we are pitted against. He is our king to whom we must be loyal; he is our captain, and to know him is to have direction in our lives.'[66] God was essentially a person, then, though lacking a physical body. Using a wartime analogy to help express this point, God was as 'real as a bayonet thrust or an embrace'.[67] Further, just as a person is made up of cells but is fundamentally something more than an assemblage of parts, so God was something more than the assemblage of human minds past, present and future, while he

[64] Ibid. p.47–8.
[65] Ibid. p.64.
[66] Ibid. p.67.
[67] Ibid. p.67.

existed through them. Thirdly, Wells' modernist God was essentially youthful in nature, emerging from death and into new life:

> [The] God of this new age, we repeat, looks not to our past but to our future, and if a figure may represent him it must be the figure of a beautiful youth, already brave and wise, but hardly come to his strength. He should stand lightly on his feet in the morning time, eager to go forward, as though he had but newly arisen to a day that was still but a promise; he should bear a sword, that clean, discriminating weapon, his eyes should be as bright as swords; his lips should fall apart with eagerness for the great adventure before him, and he should be in very fresh and golden harness, reflecting the rising sun. Death should still hang like mists and cloud banks and shadows in the valleys of the wide landscape about him.[68]

Finally, God was love, and Wells evoked the trenches to describe the 'higher' type of love that characterised God. He distinguished between one's love for the deity and romantic love thus: 'There is a strange and beautiful love that men tell of that will spring up on battlefields between sorely wounded men', he argued. 'There is often a pure exaltation of feeling between those who stand side by side manfully in any great stress', and so it followed that 'God must love his followers as a great captain loves his men'.[69]

One of the most revealing chapters was called "The Invisible King". Beginning with the heading 'Modern Religion a Political Religion', Wells argued that the Christian idea separating the realms of God and Caesar no longer applied. Rather, its 'implicit command to all its adherents is to make plain the way to the world theocracy'.[70] Therefore, Wells' political religion was an organic, counter-hegemonic ideal: 'Our God is, we feel, like Prometheus, a rebel', [71] he continued. In order to signify political and religious modernist action over passivity of ordinary politics and religion, Wells even claimed that the crucifix of the new religion 'would show God with a hand or a foot already torn away from its nail, and with eyes not downcast but resolute against the sky; a face without pain, pain lost and forgotten in

[68] Ibid. p.77–8.
[69] Ibid. p.80–1.
[70] Ibid. p.115.
[71] Ibid. p.120.

the surprising glory of the struggle and the inflexible will to live and prevail'.[72] Symbolising this new attitude, the 'idea of God as the Invisible King of the whole world means not merely that God is to be made and declared the head of the world, but that the kingdom of God is to be present throughout the whole fabric of the world'.[73] People would turn their minds to fulfilling the will of God, and would 'begin to develop the latent citizen of this world-state within himself'. These converts would then 'fall in with the idea of the world-wide sanities of this new order being drawn over the warring outlines of the present, and of men falling out of relationship with the old order and into relationship with the new'.[74] Elsewhere, we learn that the wealthy would cede their private property and businesses would be run by managers acting in the public interest. Further, the law would be re-directed to 'adjust the differing views of men as to the manner of their service to God'.[75]

In the final chapters, Wells discussed how the new religion, while currently in an embryonic stage, exhibited 'many signs that the revival is coming very swiftly'.[76] Further, in the 'last few decades', according to Wells, 'the Western mind has slipped loose from this absolutist conception of God that has dominated Christendom, at least, for many centuries',[77] which meant not merely 'a great revivification of minds trained under the decadence of orthodox Christianity', but rather an 'intensification of the religious life';[78] it was 'not an age of despair but an age of hope'.[79] For Wells this 'wave of religious revival and religious clarification' would also 'most certainly bring with it a great revival of art, religious art, music, songs, and writings of all sorts, drama, the making of shrines, praying places, temples and retreats, the creation of pictures and sculptures'.[80] Further, the new religion would not have an organised structure or priesthood of any kind, although ad hoc religious organisation would flourish for those who needed such outlets in order to reconnect with a sense of the transcendent. The new religion, he concluded, was 'like a diamond', arising 'bright, definite, and pure out of a dark matrix of structureless confusion'. Further, 'it is a Mountain of Light, growing and increasing. It is an all-pervading lucidity, a brightness and

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[72] Ibid. p.121.
[73] Ibid. p.125.
[74] Ibid. p.129.
[75] Ibid. p.144.
[76] Ibid. p.185.
[77] Ibid. p.186.
[78] Ibid. p.187.
[79] Ibid. p.188.
[80] Ibid. p.199.

clearness. It has no head to smite, no body you can destroy; it overleaps all barriers; it breaks out in despite of every enclosure. It will compel all things to orient themselves to it ... It is the Kingdom of God at hand."[81]

In 1918 Wells published his final non-fiction book on the war, *In the Fourth Year: Anticipations of a World Peace.* Here, he wrote in a far more pragmatic register and focused on the need for what he now called a 'League of Free Nations' to emerge from the war. His first chapter reasserted his claim that a peaceful future lay with the four powers capable of maintaining industrial warfare: Britain, France, Germany and the USA. He also argued for the need to create a League of Allied Nations before the war ended. Ideally, this would bring transparency into the field of the diplomacy of the war; simultaneously offering the people of the Allied powers a democratic engagement with international politics, as well as dealing the Central Powers a final ultimatum. When discussing the powers of the new league, Wells stated that it would need a Supreme Court, with powers extending to interventions between the dissatisfactions of a discrete people within a country and their sovereign rulers, for example Jews in Romania. Further, armies and navies of member nations would ultimately be under the disposal of the league, and it would have powers to limit the military capabilities of member countries. The establishment of the league would also eventually see the end of the empire in its current form, and its creation would initiate the transfer of sovereignty from individual nation states to the new league. Wells grounded the need for this vision in a new critique of the ways in which modern technology was subverting the concept of the nation state. For example, when air transport became commercially viable, he questioned how one would manage the logistics of a nation state's air space. Further, aerial bombing campaigns would become far more advanced than the current systems in a future war, as would submarine warfare, thereby extending battle zones far beyond the front line. As a result, 'Existing states have become impossible as absolutely independent sovereigns' and the 'new conditions bring them so close together and give them such extravagant powers of mutual injury that they must either sink national pride and dynastic ambitions in subordination to the common welfare of mankind or else utterly shatter one another'. Consequently, it 'becomes more and more plainly a choice between the League of Free Nations and a famished race of men looting in search of non-existent food in the

[81] Ibid. p.205–6.

smouldering ruins of civilisation'.[82] Other chapters were devoted to the need for proportional representation in Britain and the role of monarchy in the future, and the book included reproductions of articles written for *The Daily Mail*, *the Daily Chronicle*, and *The Daily News*, alongside Wells' 1917 pamphlet *A Reasonable Man's Peace*, which itself had sold around 250,000 copies.

Regarding the role of 'organic intellectuals', the most revealing discussion came in the final chapter, "The Study and Propaganda of Democracy", which again argued passionately for a counter hegemonic voice articulating the need for a League of Free Nations to make itself heard across Europe. Symbolic of its superior democratic institutions, Wells claimed that America already possessed a leader who believed wholeheartedly in this idea. Even Germany let out 'muffled cries for a new age'.[83] The duty of 'every school teacher, every tutor, every religious teacher, every writer, every lecturer, every parent, every trusted friend throughout the world', Wells argued, was to create the 'greatest of all propagandas' and 'become a teacher and missionary' for a new world. Regarding his modernist ideas on a new model of the transcendent, Wells claimed that at 'the word "God" passions bristle. The word "God" does not unite men, it angers them. But I doubt if God cares greatly whether we call Him God or no. His service is the service of man.'[84] Despite his new faith, then, Wells realised by 1918 that the term 'God' was not a useful tool for propaganda. However, his nebulous conception of the deity did not necessarily require God's name to be articulated, the new God's underlying values were impregnated into Wells' vision of a new League of Free Nations. Establish the institutions first, then refinement of the religious sentiments it would enshrine could come later. He concluded by asserting his faith thus:

> never have I been so sure that there is a divinity in man and that a great order of human life, a reign of justice and world-wide happiness, of plenty, power, hope, and gigantic creative effort, lies close at hand. Even now we have the science and the ability available for a universal welfare, though it is scattered about the world like a handful of money dropped by a child; even now there exists all the knowledge that is

[82] H. G. Wells, *In The Fourth Year: Anticipations of a World Peace* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1918) pp.111–12.
[83] Ibid. p.152.
[84] Ibid. p.154.

needed to make mankind universally free and human life sweet and noble. We need but the faith for it, and it is at hand.[85]

In an attempt to capitalise on his international profile, 1918 also saw Wells briefly work for the Ministry of Information under Max Beaverbook. At this time, Lord Northcliffe held the post of Director of Enemy Propaganda in the ministry. Wells worked under him, heading up the Committee for Propaganda in Enemy Country, a body focusing on German military and civilian populations. He did not last long in this post as his high minded ideals of spreading the ideology of a future world peace did not chime with the output of state sanctioned, xenophobic propaganda against Germany. However, unlike the figures analysed thus far, Wells did have a further outlet for propaganda that he used to convey a political message throughout the war, to which we will now turn: his wartime fiction. Here we can see not only how Wells developed his highly idiosyncratic sense of religion but also the strength of the maximal modernist model that regards political writing and historical context as material of equal potential significance as fictional output when analysing cultural production that presents a decadent modernity.

The First World War and Wells' fictional writings

During the war, Wells continued to produce fiction at a prolific rate, and this work became heavily marked by both his wartime political and his religious thinking. As we will see, fiction allowed Wells to develop and disseminate via another medium his ideas of world redemption through the establishment of a League of Free Nations, and of a world unified under the religious ideal of God the Invisible King.

We have already highlighted that *The World Set Free* demonstrated that Wells' imagination was developing the theme of war leading to cultural and political revolution before the war, ideals reflected repeatedly in his wartime non-fictional writings. Another novel that he was working on before the war was *The Research Magnificent*, published in 1915. Although this novel did not engage with the war in any detail, Wells further developed his religious worldview in its pages. The plot centres around a journey of intellectual discovery embarked upon by its central character, William Porphyry Benham, as he journeys around the world on a quest to discover a new sense of 'the aristocratic life' and the 'Noble Society'.

[85] Ibid. pp.155–6.

Eventually, Benham discovers a new ideal of God, and concludes that this figure provides a sense of unity for the new elite, which itself is the 'new knighthood, the new aristocracy'. Other familiar themes are also worked on. Not only would conversion to the new 'Prince' create an 'open conspiracy' that would be opposed to the domination of the world by democratic governments, but also the new faith would be dedicated to the establishment of a new republic that would cover the whole world.[86]

Another novel commenced before the war yet published during it was *Boon*, a book that Wells began working on in 1905 and had revised intermittently. Indeed, Samuel Hynes deemed it to be the first important novel of the war.[87] For the most part, *Boon* discusses how a sense of decadence characterised the contemporary literary imagination. Taking Henry James as its primary target, Wells juxtaposes examples of who and what he believed was wrong within the literary milieu with the figure of a prolific modern author, George Boon, who develops a speculative thesis on the 'Mind of the Race', yet dies before his modernist social philosophy is completed. The novel itself is narrated by another fictional author, Reginald Bliss, who pieces together aspects of the 'Mind of the Race' from fragments of Boon's writings and conversations. The concept of the 'Mind of the Race' again articulates the notion of a new collective consciousness, one far more altruistic than the egoistic individual created by modern capitalism, and characterised by a distinct, spiritual experience. The last of these fragments, an 'unfinished' story called "The Last Trump", reflects on a modern version of Judgement Day. Discovering an old trumpet in a brick-a-brack store, some car mechanics blow into it and inadvertently activate the Last Judgement. For an instant the dead live, and people across the whole world feel somehow profoundly affected and moved, before once again normality resumes. The story then follows one West End preacher, Mr. Parchester, who tries to discuss his awareness of the moment of *kairos* with people around him, yet they do not seem to be at all affected by the Last Judgement. Even when he discusses the matter with his boss, Bishop Wampach, Parchester is dismissed as being ridiculous. 'If a thing is sufficiently strange and great', Boon laments, 'no one will perceive it', implying that the modern age had lost awareness of truly great things.[88] Reflecting on the pessimistic tone of this story, the Bliss character then continues to extend

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[86] H. G. Wells, *The Research Magnificent* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1915) p.394.
[87] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1990) p.22–4.
[88] H. G. Wells, *Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1915) p.334.

the underlying message that Boon had tried to articulate in "The Last Trump" by relating it to the war. He argues that the conflagration had temporarily destroyed Boon's faith in the 'Mind of the Race', and that, if Boon had lived, he would have returned to a more optimistic outlook and realised that 'this multitudinous individual unhappiness is still compatible with a great progressive movement in the general mind'. Further, the 'tremendous present disaster of Europe may not be, after all, a disaster of mankind ... We must see these things from the standpoint of the Race Life, whose days are hundreds of years'.[89]

The first of Wells' wartime works of fiction that grappled with the war as its central theme was *Mr Britling Sees it Through*. This was one of Wells' most successful novels, and sold thirteen print runs by the end of 1916 alone. Wells' old friend Maxim Gorky claimed it to be 'the best, boldest, veracious and human book written in Europe in this accursed war!'[90] Further, the conversion story of Mr Britling's discovery of God became a popular reference point in sermons across the country, at least until Wells clarified his religious views in *God the Invisible King* a year later. The central Mr Britling character is clearly autobiographical, and the book follows the story of the family and acquaintances of a successful author and commentator both before and during the war. From his ranging discussions on world politics and his views on religion, Britling's general outlook repeatedly echoes Wells' own ideals. Also living with the Britling family before the war is a German tutor for their children, Heinrich, whose subsequent death at the front line becomes a central aspect of the novel's conclusion. After the outbreak of the conflict, the novel's main concern is to document Wells' changing ideas of the meaning of the war through the Britling character. Initially, he is greatly excited by the potential change in values that would inevitably occur as a result of the war, and writes an essay titled "And Now War Ends", echoing Wells' own patriotic war to end war ideal. 'Now everything becomes fluid', Mr Britling explains during the early stages of the war to his family, 'Now suddenly we face an epoch. This is an epoch. The world is plastic for men to do what they will with it. This is the end and the beginning of an age. This is something far greater than the French Revolution or the Reformation ... And we live in it.'[91] After comprehending that the war offers a moment of *kairos* for European history, Britling believes that, in order to discover the essence of the war, one has to regard it as 'something

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[89] Ibid. p.339.
[90] MacKenzie, *The Time Traveller*, p.311.
[91] H. G. Wells, *Mr Britling Sees it Through* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd, 1916) p.197.

epic and explicable',[92] and also comes to see the necessity for a world congress following the conflagration itself, alongside the need for a new League of Nations. Furthermore, he discovers within himself a hatred for Germans that confuses him, especially after reading about atrocities committed and reports of the death of civilians in zeppelin raids. After all, before the war he had known 'decent' Germans, why not now? Increasingly, Britling cannot regard the war as the heroic crusade that he felt had characterised its first months. Politicians continue to prove themselves ineffective at creating a grand vision for change and renewal, and the level of cruelty that the world could descend into becomes profoundly disturbing to sensibilities constructed in the far calmer, prewar era. War had become a 'monstrous absurdity',[93] a struggle without a point.[94] To add to the horror, shortly after these depressing realisations, Britling learns of his son's death at the front line.

After these blows, Britling realises that no-one is safe until all the potential causes of wars have been eliminated, and so he begins planning in earnest what he calls 'a real map of the world'.[95] He also begins writing a new essay on the war, "The Better Government of the World", after he began to experience a new religious consciousness, a new sense of God. The book's conclusion depicts him writing a letter to Heinrich's parents after news had reached the Britling family of his death. Some belongings have to be sent to Heinrich's family, and Mr. Britling feels that he should write an accompanying note, which he pens alongside his latest war essay. Whilst composing this letter, Britling suddenly experiences a new and more profound connection with God, 'a Presence so close to him that it was behind his eyes and in his brain and hands ... It was the Master, the Captain of Mankind, it was God, there present with him, and he knew that it was God'.[96] After several failed drafts, Britling decides that his note to Heinrich's parents should discuss this new sense of transcendental reality, thereby offering a vision of hope and new religious community emerging from the divisions and horrors of war:

> Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God and been found by God, he begins at no beginning, he works to no end ... And before the

[92] Ibid. p.206.
[93] Ibid. p.344.
[94] Ibid. p.351.
[95] Ibid. p.395.
[96] Ibid. p.427.

> coming of the true King, the inevitable King, the King who is present whenever just men forgather, this blood-stained rubbish of the ancient world, these puny kings and tawdry emperors, these wily politicians and artful lawyers, these men who claim and grab and trick and compel, these war-makers and oppressors, will presently shrivel and pass – like paper thrust into a flame.

'Our sons who have shown us God', he then says to himself after a short pause.[97] These final sentences, and therefore the lasting message that Wells enshrined in this popular book, was clearly a palingenetic vision. This sketched out the rediscovery of religion and for a new world to form itself from the ashes of the old one, now in the process of destruction – according to the ideal type of maximal modernist thought employed by this study at least, a key aspects of the paradigm. Only through a renewed discovery of God, a possibility heightened by the closeness of death (in this case Britling's son, now a martyr for the new era), could the world once again work towards achieving a desirable future. Novels allowed Wells to popularise aspects of his idiosyncratic reading of the war as holding the potential for religious renewal. Immediately after completing this work, Wells began writing *God the Invisible King.*

Wells' ideal of traditional religious sensibilities discovering a modernised sense of religiosity was most clearly articulated in his second novel published in 1917, *The Soul of a Bishop.* The narrative follows the spiritual travails of the Bishop of Princhester, and, like *Mr Britling,* is set both before and during the war. In the early pages, we learn that the bishop is having doubts about his belief in God, and especially in the notion of the Trinity. Further, not only has the death of Queen Victoria closed 'an epoch of tremendous stabilities',[98] but also, and reflective of the revolt against positivism, these prewar years are marked by an 'upheaval', altogether different from Victorian radicalism, that is predicated upon 'impatience and unreason'.[99] In addition to these social and spiritual problems, the bishop's daughter, Eleanor, sees her father's values as inherently dated and unsuitable for this new era, and the possibility that she may have a point only augments the bishop's sense of unease with the prewar world. Wells, then, again evokes a prewar Britain in steady decline and in need of

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[97] Ibid. p.432.
[98] H. G. Wells, *The Soul of a Bishop* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917) p.26.
[99] Ibid. p.26.

elemental change. Indeed, by the spring of 1914, the mood of the country, according to the narration, 'was like the uneasiness sensitive people experience before a thunderstorm. The moral atmosphere was sullen and close.'[100] The war acts as a release for the bishop and country alike, and people suddenly 'realized the epic quality of history and their own relationship to the destinies of the race'.[101] However, the failure of the church to offer any sort of moral leadership disturbs the bishop, and he starts to show signs of nervous tensions, such as smoking cigarettes, to ease his anxiety. Eventually, he confesses his various spiritual concerns to a figure epitomising the avant-garde socialite, Lady Sunderbund, portrayed as a somewhat ridiculous figure by Wells.

After a visit to his doctor's surgery regarding his depression, the bishop is prescribed a mysterious drug by an enigmatic locum doctor who wants to lift the bishop out of his current reality, defined merely as a set of 'working illusions' by this doctor, and into a new one. After taking this drug, the bishop is elevated into a higher sense of consciousness, the Kingdom of Heaven, three times. The first reveals to him the Angel of God, and here the bishop asks for the truth about God. The angel explains to him that the human mind cannot comprehend this ultimate truth. Echoing *God the Invisible King*, the angel does claim that God 'is courage, he is adventure, he is the King, he fights for you and against death'.[102] Subsequent to this vision, the bishop realises that his teachings of God to date have been profoundly incorrect and he returns to earthly consciousness. After confessing this revelation to Lady Sunderbund, she immediately supports his newfound religiosity – the only character that does. The bishop then takes the drug a second time, and in this encounter he asks the angel how he could serve God during the war. Here, the bishop realises that God is not yet fully manifest in human reality, that 'Mankind is like a smouldering fire that will presently, in quite a little time, burst out into flames',[103] and that the war is not the will of God but the epitome of the blindness of mankind to God. Nowhere, the bishop realises, are there religious leaders preaching the new gospel of mankind, of the world unified and pacific under one God. Rather, Christian leaders are all ultimately talking in nationalistic tones. If God is to rule on earth, then the teachings of the various established churches need to be transcended.

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[100] Ibid. p.73.
[101] Ibid. p.74.
[102] Ibid. p.129.
[103] Ibid. p.185.

Following the second vision of the Angel of God, the bishop delivers his revelations in a sermon. Here, he talks to his congregation of the 'unexampled dawn' to come, and claims that: 'It is your privilege' and 'your grave and terrible position, that you have been born at the very end and collapse of a negligent age, of an age of sham kingship, sham freedom, relaxation, evasion, greed, waste, falsehood, and sinister preparation. Your lives open out in the midst of the breakdown for which that age prepared.'[104] As he gives this sermon, the bishop is energised by a sensation that God is close to him because he senses a 'divine figure militant, armed, and serene'[105] standing with him during his delivery. Following this shocking sermon, the bishop loses his post in the church, and moves to London. Eventually his family, especially Eleanor, support him in a new, much poorer life. He also turns down an offer from the wealthy Lady Sunderbund to establish a gaudy new church in the capital. The bishop has a final vision, this time without the aid of the drug, where he envisages the coming of a world state, and, having seen God without the aid of the drug, becomes fully convinced of his new path.

The lengthiest of Wells' novels during the war was *Joan and Peter*, conceived as a partner to *Mr Britling*. Described somewhat harshly by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie as 'an unpleasant book, turgid, didactic and cantankerous'[106] and dismissed by others,[107] it tells the story of the education of two orphans, Joan and Peter, unrelated but brought up as brother and sister. By developing narratives describing Joan and Peter's travails at school during their Edwardian youths, Wells used these central characters to point out fundamental problems in the nation's educational institutions. Joan and Peter attend various establishments, either run as businesses or simply unable to offer syllabi that Wells regards as suitable – i.e. comprising primarily of science, modern languages and history – due to various ingrained prejudices and restrictions which encouraged an overemphasis on the classics and a 'general education'. Indeed, Wells' sensitivity to a predominant inability to put the war into a historic frame of reference in the minds of many who lived through it is blamed on this lack of historical understanding in the educational system of the day: 'Between the latest history they [Joan and Peter] had read and the things that happened about them ... was a gap of a hundred

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[104] Ibid. p.218.
[105] Ibid. p.220.
[106] MacKenzie, *The Time Traveller*, p.317.
[107] For example, it was described as 'not of much interest today' in Lovat Dickson in *H. G. Wells: His Turbulent Life and Times* (London: MacMillan, 1972) p.272. Meanwhile, Michael Foot, although acknowledging flaws in the book, has been far kinder. See Foot, *H. G.*, pp.164–7.

years or more'.[108] History, then, is portrayed as impotent if not connected to the contemporary world. Therefore, their ward, Oswald Sydenham, believes primarily that the 'war was an educational breakdown'. Further, in Peter's adolescent years Oswald found socialist literature less despair inducing than the nation's education system. Although, as a lifelong supporter of the empire, Sydenham believes socialism to be ideologically wrong, he appreciates that at least this ideology provides a schema suggesting the connections between historical, social and economic realms. In schools, on the other hand, a stifling conservatism prevails: pupils learn to obey the rules of the game, the best became prize-boys, then scholars, then fellows, then dons, and finally pedagogues, and so the decadent cycle continues.[109] The precocious Peter soon develops an interest in the creative destructive qualities of socialism, and in his early adulthood advocates a style of collectivism reminiscent of Wells' own. Discussing social and political affairs with Oswald – and typifying maximal modernist style creative destruction – Peter is clear that 'one *must* break up old things before one can hope for new' and that 'we could recover from a very considerable amount of smashing. I'm pro-smash. We have to smash.'[110]

Following the outbreak of war, Peter enlists first as a private in order to experience the discipline of war, before becoming a pilot. Here, he experiences the romanticism of flying, then the horrors of a dogfight in which he is badly injured. Wells' narration also takes time to reflect on the cultural milieu of Britain during the war. England is portrayed as 'awakening' in wartime: 'The whole Empire was lifted; a flush of unwonted splendour suffused British affairs'. However, this 'clear flame of enthusiasm' is soon subverted by 'disillusionment as that general bickering that was British public life revived again'. This shift could be detected in the poetry of the war as 'glowing young heroes', such as Rupert Brooke, 'shine with a faith undiminished'. He and his ilk 'sing and die in what they believe to be a splendid cause and for a splendid end'. After three years, Siegfried Sassoon shifted the tone and developed a 'cry of anger at the old men who have led the world to destruction ... dull, ignorant men ... men who have lost the freshness and simplicity but none of the greed and egoism of youth'. Now youth asked their elders '*What is this to which you have brought us? What have you done with our lives?*'[111] As for the novel's central characters, Peter has epiphanic

[108] H. G. Wells, *Joan and Peter* (Bath: Cadric Chivers Ltd. 1974) p.318.
[109] Ibid. p.194.
[110] Ibid. p.291.
[111] Ibid. pp.325–6.

moments whilst flying in which he feels that 'he droned his liquid way towards a new sort of life altogether, towards a greater civilisation, a worldwide life for men with no boundaries in it at all except the emptiness of outer space, a life of freedom and exultation and tremendous achievement'.[112] After he is shot down, he has a vision of God, now a figure somewhat distinct from the youthful image given in *God the Invisible King*. Located in a messy office, the Lord God 'had the likeness of a lean, tired, intelligent looking oldish man, with an air of futile friendliness masking a futile indifference'. When Peter enquires as to why the war continued and why He did not stop it, God replies that it was for the likes of Peter to change things, not him, stating that 'If you have no will to change it, you have no right to criticise it', and arguing 'You asked me why I didn't exert myself. Well – why don't *you* exert yourself?'[113]

The book's concluding messages run along now familiar lines, invoking the need for elemental change to characterise the coming peace. The man of empire building, Oswald, is converted to the need for a League of Free Nations.[114] Evoking the notion that one has to look to the past to transcend the present, he also points out to Joan and Peter: 'you have to reach back and touch the England of Shakespeare, Milton, Raleigh, and Blake – and that means you have to go forward'. Further: 'you have to create. Now. You, with your fresh vision, with the lessons you have learned still bright in your minds, you have to remake the world.'[115] Peter asserts the need for the new World State to be marked by a creative dynamic that would be capable of putting an end to the boredom and educational decadence that had led to wars. Ultimately, this meant putting a new vision of God at the centre of the new international system, a being around which all the world can unite, providing a renovated concept of the transcendent at the heart of a new modernity.[116]

The Undying Fire, published in 1919 but set in the final year of the war, marked the end of this overt religiosity in Wells' fictional writing. Essentially, the novel is a modernised version of the Book of Job. The story again takes a critique of education as a central theme, indeed the book was dedicated 'To all the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses and every teacher in the word'. The biblical Job is replaced by Job Huss, a headmaster at a 'great

[112] Ibid. p.350.
[113] Ibid. p.355–8.
[114] Ibid. p.395.
[115] Ibid. p.398.
[116] Ibid. p.400.

modern public school at Woldingstanton'[117] where he employs 'new methods in the teaching of history and politics' alongside modern languages and a rigorous, scientific curriculum. The downfall of Huss' world begins when he believes that he had lost his only son in the war, after which he develops a tumour necessitating a serious operation. Meanwhile, two of the school governors, Sir Eliphaz Burrows and Mr. William Dad, alongside the distinctively utilitarian and ambitious head of chemistry at the school, Mr Farr, decide that, given Huss' poor health alongside a recent fire at the school which they attribute to Huss, he should be removed from his position and replaced with the more business minded Mr Farr. Echoing the Book of Job, the three men then go to Huss' bedside before the operation, and the four of them are soon embroiled in a theological discussion on the nature of God, and how religion affects the educational direction of the school. Here, Huss rails against the notion of education serving primarily commercial ends. He also adumbrates his idea of mankind holding within itself an 'undying fire', essentially a reiteration under a different name of Wells' previous ideas of a collective connection with a deity that was both deeply personal as well as an expression of community with the entire human race, past, present and future. The three visitors are horrified by these statements and call for him to repent what are, to them, heresies.

Undeterred, Huss continues to argue that God shows no sign of his existence, but is a clear presence to all those who have been able to transcend an egoistical form of consciousness.[118] Further, for Huss, God is a figure who inspires rebellion, and who would bring salvation from the war and his own crises: 'I am the servant of a rebellious and adventurous God', he asserts, a figure 'who may yet bring order into this cruel and frightful chaos in which we seem to be driven hither and thither like leaves before the wind, a God who, in spite of all appearances, may yet rule over it and at last mould it to his will'.[119] Huss then reiterates more Wellsian principles, stating that this new God needed to form the foundation of any League of Nations,[120] and also reprises the argument that the war marked a failure of 'historical and social education'.[121] Salvation lies in enough people transcending an ego led individualism, epitomised by the technical and commercial mind, and discovering

[117] H. G. Wells, *The Undying Fire: A Contemporary Novel* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1919) p.23.
[118] Ibid. p.151.
[119] Ibid. p.162.
[120] Ibid. p.167.
[121] Ibid. p.186.

their common 'undying fire' within their souls. Only this formula will prevent mankind from descending into cul-de-sacs of individualism. God is 'crying out in our hearts to save us from these blind allies of selfishness, darkness, cruelty, and pain in which our race must die', and Huss argues that 'he is crying for the high road which is salvation, he is commanding the organised unity of mankind'.[122] Above all, as in *God the Invisible King*, God is courage. This truth Huss discovers while undergoing his operation, when he experiences an intuitive connection with God and Satan. Here, Huss learns that life is ultimately predicated upon uncertainty regarding the future, it is a continual struggle. God justifies this point thus: 'Why should you struggle if the end is assured? How can you rise if there is no depth into which you can fall?',[123] and appeals to Huss, as a representative of all of mankind, to develop the will to struggle and change the injustices and horrors of the world. Following the operation and this moment of *kairos*, Huss' life is entirely regenerated. After its removal, the surgeon discovers that Huss' tumour is not cancerous, and his recovery is the most successful ever witnessed by the surgeon. Meanwhile, the remaining governors of Woldingstanton decide to stand by Huss, and he soon starts to plan how the new school will be reformed to meet the needs of the postwar world. Emphasising the veracity of the educational ideals that he had expounded in his theological debates, an ex-pupil also writes a letter expressing how Huss' brand of education had evoked in him the necessary creative spirit needed to make '*a real world state, a world civilisation and a new order of things*' after the war.[124] Completing his path to redemption, Huss' son sends a telegram explaining that he had been captured, held as an enemy prisoner of war, and would be returning home in due course.

The arguments that Wells articulated in his political writings asserting the need to propagate as widely as possible faith in a new conception of God, a figure unifying the transition to a new world-state, then, were extended in his fictional writings from the period. Undoubtedly, this was sophisticated propaganda, and the quality of the fiction was not restricted by the didactic aims of Wells' political and religious engagement with a decadent-seeming modernity. Nevertheless, these palingenetic tropes were central in Wells' wartime novels. Whatever we are to make of these books from a literary critical perspective, from the point of view of their intellectual history, they are clearly the product both of the war itself

[122] Ibid. p.198.
[123] Ibid. p.228.
[124] Ibid. p.246

and also Wells' developing and highly idiosyncratic religious modernism; something quite different from, say, guild socialism. Because of the searching nature of religious thought expressed in books such as *God the Invisible King* and novels such as *The Undying Fire*, one Wells expert has concluded that if Wells had been able to work these thoughts into a coherent meditation on religion, 'in the manner of system-spinning philosophers and theologians, he might have made something of a splash in twentieth century religious thought'.[125] However, immediately after the war, Wells articulated a maximal modernist tenor in his non-fiction writings addressing what he regarded as the world crisis. It is worth briefly surveying some of these works in order to see how his fecund mind responded to the immediate postwar era.

Postwar writings on the contemporary state of crisis

In the aftermath of the war, Wells remained profoundly moved by the calamity the conflagration induced. During and immediately after the war, he had been actively engaged, alongside Leonard Woolf, J. A. Spender, J. L. Garvin, Wickham Steed and Gilbert Murray in what was called the League of Free Nations Association. In 1919, the 'Research Committee' of this organisation published two pamphlets on the topic of the league *The Idea of a League of Nations* and *The Way to the League of Nations* that echoed Wells' previous discussions on the need and nature of any future league. The following year, Wells published *Russia in the Shadows*, a book comprising reportage writings of his travels through Soviet Russia in the autumn of 1920. Here, he was far from complementary as regards the state of the country. For example, his chapter on the state of Petersburg pulled no punches when describing the chaos into which Soviet Russia was descending: 'Our dominant impression of things Russian is an impression of a vast irreparable breakdown ... Never in all history has there been so great a *débâcle* before'.[126] More worryingly, he argued, the chaos in the region carried with it implications for all of Europe: 'The dominant fact for the Western reader, the threatening and disconcerting fact, is that a social and economic system very like our own and intimately connected with our own has collapsed'.[127] His final chapter argued for the need for western powers to support Russia, not because Communism was the ideal solution for the

[125] Warger, *H. G. Wells and the World State* p.105.
[126] H. G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921) p.17.
[127] Ibid. p.18.

antinomies of capitalist modernity, but because it was the only solution other than total chaos. Further, if Communism failed and the country descended into total chaos, this societal decadence would only spread further afield. Should such an eventuality occur, he warned, 'all modern civilisation will tumble' into a similar crisis.[128] The need for a greater sensitivity to western civilisation teetering on the verge of total collapse after the war, then, was the underlying message of this book.

This concern was again articulated in his 1921 book, *The Salvaging of Civilisation*, which offered a more general critique of the postwar world. According to Wells, the 'new phase of disorder, conflict, and social unravelling upon which we have entered' would last until a new, overarching ideal governed the world. Even if 'for a time the decadence seems to be arrested', he continued, the illusion of peace would not last because, without elemental change, 'a fresh war-storm sufficiently destructive and disorganising' would 'restore the decadent process'.[129] Wells also articulated the need for a new form of patriotism to be developed in the chapter "The Enlargement of Patriotism to a World State", claiming that the 'world perished for want of a common political idea'.[130] Extending this idea, the core of the book comprised of two chapters on the topic of the 'Bible of Civilisation', a modernised form of the holy book. 'I think that during the last century', Wells opined, 'the Bible has lost much of its former hold. It no longer grips the community.'[131] He continued by echoing concerns over the break-up of the social fabric thus: '*our modern communities are no longer cemented*, they lack organized solidarity, they are not prepared to stand shocks and strains, they have become dangerously loose mentally and morally ... We need to get back to a cement. We want a Bible.'[132] This new holy book would tell the story of the development of the earth, the growth of life from the oceans to the emergence of animals and finally tell the story of the evolution of the human race to the present day. Further, 'it will still point our lives to a common future which will be the reward and judgement of our present lives'.[133] Modern society had 'lost touch with history', according to Wells, therefore it had 'ceased to see human affairs as one great epic unfolding'.[134] By renovating the idea of a unifying holy

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[128] Ibid. p.179.
[129] H. G. Wells, *The Salvaging of Civilisation* (London: Cassel and Company Ltd., 1921) p.10.
[130] Ibid. p.80.
[131] Ibid. p.101.
[132] Ibid. p.102.
[133] Ibid. p.107.
[134] Ibid. p.110.

book, 'We shall be living again in a plan', he claimed, 'Our lives will be shaped by certain definite ends. We shall fall into place in a greater scheme of activities. We shall recover again some or all of the steadfastness and dignity of the old religious life.'[135] His interest in modernising religion, then, continued into the interwar period. Indeed, Wells had by this point developed his own prototype of this new text, his history of the world.

Turning finally to this epic work, we find that the first volume began with a history of the planet's position in space, and then discusses the evolution of life on earth before finally turning to the history of human existence. Regarding the character of mankind revealed by this history, we can see a number of partisan points underpinning Wells' political views, now set in a comprehensive historical narrative of the world. For example, he clearly stated that early man was bereft of warfare, and that war 'has not been in the world for more than 20,000 years'.[136] Unlike figures such as Levy and Orage, Wells did not view war as an elemental aspect of the human condition. This suggested that a world of eternal conflict, as presented by, say, Nietzsche, could one day be transcended. He also repeatedly articulated his conviction that people needed a point of reference outside themselves to guide them through life, lifting them out of an egotistical individualism. One instance of this trope argued that his recounting of history was 'strictly in accordance with the teachings of Buddha', and that there is 'no social order, no security, no peace or happiness, no righteous kingship or leadership, unless men loose themselves in something greater than themselves',[137] a sense of secular transcendence now offered through this comprehensive history of mankind.

In his analysis of more recent events, Wells argued that French Revolution had marked a watershed moment in historical time, and that this was merely the 'opening outbreak of a great cycle of political and social storms that still continue' and this storm would last until 'every vestige of nationalist monarchy has been swept out of the world and the skies clear again for the great peace of the federation of mankind'.[138] For Wells, history moved in fits and starts, 'periods of revolution are periods of action', he argued, 'in them men reap the harvests of ideas that have grown during the phases of interlude, and they leave

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[135] Ibid. p.135.
[136] H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (London: The Waverly Book company Ltd., 1920) p.85.
[137] Ibid. p.208.
[138] Ibid. p.436.

the fields clear for a new season of growth'.[139] Regarding the First World War, Wells argued that the conflagration had emerged from modern imperialism, the most 'megalomaniac' instance of which was to be found in Germany. The only possible alternative to this ideology on the international stage was for new, international, and democratic institutions to replace the style of diplomacy epitomised by embassies and foreign offices.[140] In the year following the war, he again underscored a sensitivity to the alleged societal decadence of the era, arguing that Europe had become like 'a man who has had some vital surgical operation very roughly performed, and who is not yet sure whether he can now go on living or whether he has been so profoundly shocked and injured that he will presently fall down and die'.[141] As for the League of Nations, this was 'not a league of people at all; it was a league of "states, dominions, or colonies"... a league of "representatives" of foreign offices' that had failed even to 'abolish the nonsense of embassies at every capital'.[142]

Counterpointing this sense of despair, the final chapter, "The Possible Unification of the World into One Community of Knowledge and Will", offered another sketch of Wells' unique and highly futural maximal modernist vision articulating the emergence of a cohesive world state, an alternate modernity. Indeed, the scale of his grand historical vision, blending many diverse aspects of human history into a sense of dynamic renewal, is another unique aspect of Wells' writings that distinguishes him from other maximal modernists so far encountered. Synthesising political and scientific speculation, mythic notions of death and rebirth, a paean to the creativity of youth, an appeal to rediscover the epic, and in so doing capping his meta-narrative of human origins and destiny, Wells concluded his book in a prophetic tenor, stating that:

> Men will unify only to intensify the search for knowledge and power, and live as ever for new occasions ... Life begins perpetually. Gathered together at last under the leadership of man, the student-teacher of the universe, unified, disciplined, armed with the secret powers of the atom and with knowledge as yet beyond dreaming,

[139] Ibid. p.483.
[140] Ibid.) pp.560–1.
[141] Ibid. p.578.
[142] Ibid. p.590.

> Life, forever dying to be born afresh, forever young and eager, will presently stand upon this earth as upon a footstool, and stretch out its realm amid the stars.[143]

Conclusions

To summarise, even when regarding Wells through the heuristic lens of maximal modernism, we see a figure very different from those writing for *The New Age*. For example, Wells was not interested in Nietzsche or Marx, and was a proponent of the League of Nations – characteristics that would have been heavily critiqued by Orage and others. Further, Wells' positive influences were also distinct; most clearly, William James was a very important precursor to his religiosity, and this aspect of his wartime thinking was clearly central to his writings during, if not after, the war. In order to draw out some preliminary conclusions from this survey of Wells' writings around the war period, then, we can make a number of points. Firstly, the creation of a form of religious modernism was central to Wells' wartime thinking. This included novel amendments to previous conceptions of religion, such as the division between a finite 'God the redeemer' and an infinite 'God the Creator'. This new faith formed the ontological base upon which his political modernism, which presented an alternative modernity in the form of a new, world state. As in his prewar fiction, in this re-sacralised new era citizens of a futuristic world state would be spiritually reborn and socially unified, bringing peace and prosperity to the twentieth century. From a maximal perspective at least, this regenerative vision identifies Wells as a modernist; though undoubtedly literary critics concerned with aesthetic modernism would find such a characterisation more problematic. Secondly, Wells clearly regarded the war as a fundamental rupture in the flow of historical time, a war to end war and for the world to begin anew, an articulation, then of the maximal modernist hope that regarded the war as the end of one era and the beginning of a new one. Thirdly, we can see that, even before the war, many of the themes that crystallised into his political and religious modernism – such as developing a modernised religion, a synergy between fictional and non-fictional writings, rejection of piecemeal change, sense of crisis in temporal categories, revolutionary elite, a world state, and so forth – were already under development. Therefore, the war provided an event filled with the necessary

[143] Ibid. p.608.

destructive and creative qualities that allowed him to weave these strands of thought into a coherent tapestry that promoted the redemption of humanity. Although intellectually highly distinct from *The New Age* regulars, Wells too regarded modernity in general, and the war in particular, as phenomena throwing an era into elemental confusion; the modern world after the war lacked cement, as he put it. Counterpointing this alleged decadence, his cultural production articulated a countervailing vision of renewal.

Chapter 5: May Sinclair's 'exquisite moment'

From Wells' maximal modernist reworking of religious faith into a modern political religion, we now turn to May Sinclair, another British intellectual deeply concerned with the restoration of a higher purpose to life as a result of the war. We will see once again in this chapter how a unique intellectual genealogy fed into a British intellectual's wartime writings, demonstrating that maximal modernism should not be thought of as either as a socialist set of ideas, or Nietzschean phenomenon; rather it refers to a tenor that can be injected into a wide range of intellectual production. As we will see, Sinclair's wartime writing came in a number of forms, including fiction, psychology, idealist philosophy, and even a journal of her experiences of working as a nurse in Belgium in 1914. This led to a very different synthesis of ideas, when compared to the case studies examined thus far. In order to fully comprehend how Sinclair's wartime fiction manifests a renewed articulation of the transcendent, it is crucial to appreciate the synergy between her philosophical stance and the maximal modernist quality of her fiction. Indeed, this point lies at the core of Sinclair's understanding of the war. In her recent biography of Sinclair, *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian*, Suzanne Raitt, minimizes this link.[1] This limitation is reflected elsewhere in the secondary literature on Sinclair. For example, in a recent essay on Sinclair and the First World War, Terry Philips pays little attention to blend of idealist philosophy, psychology and mysticism in her wartime fiction,[2] and the essays in Andrew J. Kunka and Michele K. Troy's edited volume *May Sinclair: Moving Towards the Modern* do not provide any exploration of this aspect of Sinclair's cultural production.

Before the war broke out, Sinclair had already begun to develop a vision for cultural renewal through female emancipation in her feminist writing. For example, in a feminist pamphlet written in 1908, in commenting on the potential for elemental cultural change to be realised through the emergence of women's rights, alongside the sense of a wider sense of cultural renaissance, she argued that the

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[1] Suzanne Raitt, *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.10.
[2] Terry Philips, 'The Self In Conflict: May Sinclair and the Great War', in P. J. Quinn and S. Trout (eds.), *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) pp.55–66.

> coming generation will, I believe, witness a finer art, a more splendid literature than has been since the Elizabethan Age ... The Nineteenth Century was an age of material cocksureness, and of spiritual doubt. The Twentieth Century will be the age of spiritual certainty.– And this thing, this desire of all the ages, this spiritual certainty will, I believe, come through the coming revolution, by the release of captive forces, by breathing in among us of the Spiritual Life, the genius of enfranchised women.[3]

After the outbreak of the war, Sinclair tempered her feminist message, and focused on the idea of the war as a form of redemption from a decaying society. Conveying the underlying message that war and especially combat experiences offered a form of spiritual regeneration, access to a 'higher' reality vested with numinous qualities, Sinclair's wartime writings form another example of a British intellectual whose writings were predicated upon a maximal modernist tone during the war. To begin exploring in more detail this interpretation of the war's underlying meaning, it is worth briefly examining Sinclair's own descriptions of the revelations she experienced while in Belgium at the beginning of the war, where moments of danger altered her perceptions regarding a 'higher' sense of reality.

Belgium 1914

In September and October 1914, Sinclair travelled to Belgium to work as part of an ambulance unit, an encounter that had an overwhelming impact on her, as the diary of these experiences, which she later published, reveals. For example, on 29 September she wrote the following entry, which documents a powerful desire to reach the front line:

> It is as if something had been looking for you, waiting for you, from all eternity out here; and, when you are getting near, it begins calling you; it draws your heart out to it all day long. You can give no account of it. All that you know about it is unique. It has nothing to do with your ordinary curiosities and interests and loves ... you can't "get" anything out of it. It is something hidden and secret and supremely urgent. Its urgency, indeed, is so great that if you miss it you will have missed reality itself.[4]

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[3] May Sinclair *Votes for Women* Dec. 24, 1908, in T. Boll, *Miss May Sinclair: Novelist. A Biographical and Critical Introduction* (New Jersey: Fairleigh University Press, 1973) pp. 88–9.
[4] May Sinclair, *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1915) pp.79–80.

This sense of destiny, elided with the desire to experience the excitement of the battlefield reappears at crucial points of the journal's narratives of her time in Belgium. Another example is the entry detailing Sinclair's first artillery duel between Allied and German forces. Demonstrating Sinclair's embrace of the sense of losing self-control due to the magnitude of events, a moment of *kairos* outside of normal time, it states:

> there is something about the sound of the first near gun of your first battle that ... will make you smile in spite of yourself ... The effect on your nerves is now like that of being in a very small sailing boat in a very big-running sea. You climb wave after high wave, and are not swallowed up as expected. You wait, between guns, for the boom and the shock of the next, with a passionate anticipation, as you wait for the next wave. And the sound of the gun when it comes is like the exhilarating smack of the wave that you and your boat mean to resist and do resist when it gets to you.[5]

And Sinclair records another transcendental experience while rushing to rescue a wounded man from a house near an area of intense fighting:

> There was something odd about that short stretch of grey road and the tall trees at the end of it and the turn. These things appeared in a queer, vivid stillness, as if they were not there on their own account, but stood in witness to some superior reality. Through them you were somehow assured of Reality with the most singular and overpowering certainty. You were aware of the possibility of an ensuing agony and horror as of something unreal and transitory that would break through the peace of it in a merely episodical manner ... And with your own quick movements up the road there came that steadily mounting thrill which is not excitement, or anything in the least like excitement, because of its extreme quietness. This thrill is apt to cheat you by stopping short of the ecstasy it seems to promise. But this time it did not stop short; it became more and more steady and more and more quiet in the swing of its vibration; it became ecstasy; it became intense happiness ... while it lasted you had

[5] Ibid. pp. 169–70.

the sense of touching Reality at its highest point in a secure and effortless consummation.[6]

Such quotations raise several key questions regarding Sinclair's stance on the war. Why did she find states of transcendence and ecstasy in these experiences? As a writer of fiction, how did she use these encounters when narrating fictional episodes of the war? And what did she mean by connecting with 'Reality at its highest point'?

Sinclair only had first-hand experiences of combat for a very short time, and these were at the beginning of the war, a period when the uprooting of masses of Belgian refugees by the German invasion was seen by many as a moral outrage that justified the British hostilities. This sense of moral indignation would later be reflected in her war fiction, and her time in Belgium justified to her the ethical necessity of the war. When Sinclair returned to the conflagration in her fictional writing, she explored the idea that encounters with combat offered experiences of ecstasy and the connection to a higher sense of reality. Any explanation of why this sense of epiphany was prominent in her wartime fiction requires a reading informed by the ideas that she was developing in her philosophical idealism. In so doing, one begins to appreciate that, for Sinclair, the noun 'Reality' signified a metaphysical dimension to which the material realm was a mere epiphenomenon. The idea of the war as redemptive was not only explored in her war diary, *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, but also *Tasker Jevons*, and the notion that war was spiritually regenerative, offering connection with a higher 'Reality', formed the centrepiece of *The Tree of Heaven*. Further, the reasoning behind this viewpoint was most clearly articulated in a philosophical register in her *A Defence of Idealism*. Let us now turn to the development of this philosophical work, as from this philosophical perspective we can see more clearly how Sinclair developed her unique interpretation of modernity as decadence.

Wartime psychology, philosophy and journalism

From an early age, Sinclair had been interested in Plato, Kant and the German Romantics, and had received a challenging education in philosophy at Cheltenham Ladies College. Following Kant, and in revolt against her devout mother, she rejected organised Christianity, as H. G. Wells did, and this sense of rebellion helped fuel her interest in other forms of

[6] Ibid. pp. 193–94.

religious and spiritual thought. Unlike Kant, however, she was not so sceptical of discussions on the afterlife, spiritualism and ultimate questions, as revealed in her discussions in *A Defence of Idealism* (hereafter *A Defence*).[7] Before offering an exegesis of Sinclair's philosophical stance, as outlined in *A Defence*, this section will begin by looking at two articles published in *The Medical Press* in August 1916 that offer an illuminating insight on how Sinclair conceived of the role of psychoanalysis from her perspective as a neo-idealist philosopher.

In these articles, Sinclair developed a reading of psychoanalysis that characterised it as an emerging way of thinking based on the understanding that 'Civilisation is one vast system of sublimation'.[8] Ultimately, this process was 'the striving of the Libido towards manifestation in higher and higher forms',[9] a process that was possible only because the human organism possessed a quantity of Libido that was surplus to its immediate needs for survival. She claimed that the emergence of humans as moral and social beings, alongside their technological achievements, was a result of this abundance of the Libido being sublimated into ever higher forms. By consciously embracing the power of the Libido, either through psychoanalysis, eastern mysticism, or art, one could prevent oneself from degenerating into a state of neurosis, or even insanity. Indeed, for Sinclair, both of these conditions were psychic retreats into more primitive forms of existence. What she regarded as the cruder forms of religion, namely the belief structures of pagan tribes, were also criticised from this psychoanalytic perspective as forms of repression of the Libido. Nevertheless, Sinclair highlighted in these essays her belief that the role of sublimation of the Libido in the thinking of religious ascetics and artists was the underlying reason for the profundity of their works. It was through mastering this process that such figures could truly grasp the highest realms accessible to human consciousness. For this reason, she could not agree with Jung's analysis of the *Upanishads* that presented them as a form of primitive, mythic consciousness, because she believed such texts possessed a higher 'Sublimative value'. Further, from her idealist position the Libido could even be seen to possess many of the aspects of a god, noting that it was 'eternal, indestructible, pure in its essence, infinite in its manifestations, of which the sexual impulse is only one'.[10] The works of poets and saints, she claimed, demonstrated a deeply insightful access to highly sublimated forms of the

[7] May Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism* (London: no publisher, 1917).
[8] May Sinclair, 'Clinical Lecture on Symbolism and Sublimation – I', *The Medical Press*, vol.152 (1916) p.119.
[9] Ibid.
[10] May Sinclair, 'Symbolism and Sublimation – II', *The Medical Press*, vol.153 (1916) p.144

Libido, and it was this aspect that gave them a sacred quality. Consequently, texts such as the *Upanishads* were 'highly metaphysical and spiritual interpretations of the primitive rituals and myths' of the *Vedas*, and Sinclair claimed that the importance of such works rested upon the fact that their 'language is symbolic, not in the primitive sense, but in the modern poetic sense'.[11] Therefore, through a psychoanalytic discourse she believed that their spiritual message could be demonstrated as possessing current relevance.

To turn to *A Defence*, we find here a text that was built upon Sinclair's philosophical education, and especially a lifelong interest in idealism, alongside her interests in psychology and eastern mysticism. Both her biographers to date offer little in the way of a critical exegesis of this philosophical analysis. Although repeatedly making reference to *A Defence*, Raitt does not give a detailed analysis of the book's arguments; while Boll, although offering a précis of the book, fails to draw out its wider significance as an example of radical, modernist thought which rejects rationalism in favour of a modernised form of mysticism and idealism; indeed, he prefers to praise its wit.[12] Contrasting somewhat with the ideas that we have thus far encountered in other maximal modernists, essentially the book proposed a new variation of idealist monism and Sinclair's introduction succinctly aligns her argument with the basic precepts of idealism, and outlined her aim; that is, to develop new arguments for this philosophy so that it might meet the demands of the twentieth century. Essentially, Sinclair conceived of her task as an attempt to shift philosophical sympathies away from the ideas of Pragmatists, Vitalists and the New Realists, the latter epitomised by Bertrand Russell and Alfred Whitehead. Indeed, the New Realists were seen as the greatest threat, and she hoped that 'New Realism will grow old and die, and the New Idealism will be born again'.[13] Revealing the importance she placed upon defending idealism against the assertions of Russell – a philosophy she attempted to downgrade to the study of mere appearance – a quarter of the book critiqued the developments of 'New Realism'. The remaining text consisted of a series of essays engaging with idealism's other detractors, covering issues such as pan-psychism and the evolutionary ideas of Samuel Butler, alongside Bergsonian philosophy as a way of conveying a spiritual dimension in the role of memory.

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[11] Ibid.
[12] For this summary see: Boll, *May Sinclair*, pp.258–60.
[13] Sinclair, *A Defence*, p.viii.

Of great interest among these essays is chapter 7, "The New Mysticism". Here, Sinclair developed her ideas about the significance of mysticism. Although she criticised many aspects of the history of mystical thought, Sinclair also argued that mystics alone, 'the real plungers' as she called them, could truly perceive an 'Ultimate Reality' that offered a more complete perspective than that offered by the essentially erroneous, pluralistic perspective which the New Realism's materialist understanding of the world represented. Sinclair also took the opportunity to diagnose major faults with the spiritual message of Christianity, arguing that it failed to be 'spiritual enough' in her estimation.[14] Further, she claimed that the modern world was in need of new forms of spiritual sustenance to sublimate the Libido, arguing: 'Mysticism is as indestructible as the human libido, and as persistent as human folly; and its revival in the twentieth century is precisely what you might expect in an age in which neurosis is the prevailing malady'.[15] Sinclair also stated clearly in this chapter her view that the notion of mystic revelation and experiences of danger were closely related. For example, the following passage articulated her vision of the 'exquisite and incredible assurance, the positively ecstatic vision of Reality' that could be experienced when one encountered death for the first time.[16] The closeness of death also demonstrates how Sinclair idealised people who surrendered themselves to fate thereby risking sacrificing their lives in the war:

> There is no certainty that life can give that surpasses or even comes anywhere near it [i.e. the vision of 'Reality' created by exposure to danger]. And the world has been full of *these* mystics, *these* visionaries, since August 1914. Sometimes I think they are the only trustworthy ones. How pure, how absolute is their surrender; how candid and untroubled their confession; how spontaneous and undefiled their witness ... This is the kind of certainty we want to tide us over the straits where Western Mysticism often leaves us floundering.[17]

The rest of the essay builds on her sense of the spiritual decadence currently characterising the western world, and makes the case for the study of various mystical texts, especially the

[14] Ibid. p.280.
[15] Ibid. p.283.
[16] Ibid. p.302.
[17] Ibid. pp.302–3.

Upanishads, as a means to re-invest modernity with a highly developed sense of mysticism, thereby allowing for a healthy sublimation of the Libido. If realised, this re-spiritualisation of western thought through eastern philosophy would lead to what she described as a 'slow yet inevitable maturing of the Western mind'.[18] According to Sinclair, such a renovation of a higher sense of reality would be possible because, unlike most works of Christian mysticism, texts such as the *Upanishads* deal 'directly with the Transcendent'.

In her concluding discussion, she gives further details of this mystical worldview. Here, Sinclair considered probable a relationship between the material and a spiritual world in which the higher spiritual realm could have agency upon the material world. Consequently, speaking about the trend towards spiritualism and claims by mediums to connect with the realm of spirit, Sinclair comments that '*things happen*', and that, despite many cases of spiritualists being shams, they 'cannot all be fraud, all of the time'.[19] Further, she considered that 'telepathy is a fact',[20] and that there were authentic cases 'of the continuous apparition, of the ghost that haunts'.[21] To cap this list of exotic phenomena was her final assertion: resurrection and the immortality of the soul. Regarding this concept, she criticised pagan conceptions of reincarnation as erroneous because ultimately these religions located the immortal soul on earth, whereas a true awareness of the soul's immortality required consciousness of the 'higher' spiritual sense of reality which revealed to the human mind its non-material essence. Only through such a spiritual consciousness could people become fully aware of their immortality.[22] Further, Sinclair felt that cultures that had lost touch with a sense of immortality were societies falling into decline. For example, she claimed that 'in the decadence of over-civilised races, when they are about to be conquered by the younger and stronger race, the belief and the hope and the desire for immortality weaken and die'.[23] As well as a sign of cultural health, thus counterpointing such decadence, her philosophy also led her to speculate that belief in immortality promoted the realisation that it 'may be that individuality is only one stage, and not the highest and most important stage, in the real life-process of the self. It may be that a self can only become a perfect individual by taking on

[18] Ibid. p.307.
[19] Ibid. p.350.
[20] Ibid. p.351.
[21] Ibid. p.353.
[22] Ibid. p.364.
[23] Ibid. p.364.

the experience of millions of other individuals.'[24] In these final passages, Sinclair clarified her perspective, arguing that the self is a higher, metaphysical entity when compared to the sense of individuality, and that it is the latter that will be lost upon entry into the spiritual dimension:

> The individual, that is to say, may have to die that the self may live ... *He* has no consciousness of anything anymore at all. But the life after death of the perfected self would mean an enormous increase of consciousness, through a spiritual communion in which all is imperfect in passion, all that is tentative in compassion and insight and inspiration is finished and complete.[25]

From this perspective, Sinclair believed that an absolute spirit constituted the ultimate form of reality, a force whose infinite nature encapsulated life itself, and which was the ultimate essence out of which all individuals were merely constituent parts. She concluded that this

> one Infinite Spirit, then, *is* the finite selves. That the selves are not conscious of this union is the tragedy of their finitude. In our present existence we *are* spirit; but so limited in our experience that we know the appearances of Spirit far better than we know Spirit itself. If we knew them *all*, and if, in order to know them, it so happened that we increased the pace of the rhythm of time as it is increased in our dream consciousness, only to an immeasurably more intense degree, the chances are that we should know the spirit, not as it appears but as it is. Appearances would be whirled for us, as it were, into the one Reality, as the colours of the spectrum, painted on a revolving disc, are whirled into one whiteness by sheer rapidity of its revolutions.[26]

Epitomising the trend of the revolt against positivism, then, Sinclair argued that revelation of this poetic vision was restricted to mystics, visionaries, artists, heroes and lovers. It was certainly not visible to the scientific, materialistic mindsets of realists. For Sinclair, those who eschewed the world of appearance and plunged into mysticism could escape decadence and

[24] Ibid. p.375.
[25] Ibid. p.375.
[26] Ibid. pp.378–9.

experience: 'moments when the human creature we have known all our life without truly knowing it, reveals its incredible godhead'. Further, the presence of danger was a key instigator of these glimpses of the eternal, senses of *kairos* that enabled 'moments of sure and perfect happiness, because the adorable Reality gives itself to our very sight and touch'.[27] Clearly, this is a very different argument for the decadence of modernity when compared to those postulated by the guild socialists or Wells.

To finish this summary of the ideas that Sinclair developed during the war in her non-fiction writings, before turning to her wartime fiction, it is worth also briefly surveying the dynamics of her feminist journalism. In November 1914, Sinclair published an article in *Collier's Magazine*, "Women's Sacrifices for the War", that argued the war was a historic opportunity for women to show their moral courage by tempering the feminist cause, and demonstrating their ability to make sacrifices for their country. She began the piece with examples of this sacrifice, which included: organising relief efforts and feeding the poor of London; volunteering for nursing positions with the Red Cross; caring for refugees in their spare time; temporarily filling men's jobs, thereby freeing them to fight; and dropping the militant stance of suffragettes. She then discussed the subject of how the war represented a moment of opportunity for the women's movement, arguing that it would enable women to 'put their beliefs to the test and justify many of their claims'.[28] She devoted a section of the article to the issue of women filling men's jobs, claiming that, although women might be welcomed into areas that they could happily fill, they should be wary of appearing to capitalise upon the war contingency as a means of achieving their political ends, and should be willing to relinquish these gains when men return. Her discussion then turned to a more emotional appeal for national unity in a time of crisis, peppered with the palingenetic notion of the war as a necessary purge of undesirable and antithetical elements within the nation's body politic:

> It [the war] has come to us, perhaps more than to any other nation, for that purifying by fire which nations must pass through from moment to moment of their history. The supreme test of their fitness to endure. It came to us when we needed it most, as an opportune postponement, if not the end of our internal dissention – the struggle

[27] Ibid. p.379.
[28] May Sinclair, 'Women's Sacrifices for the War', *Collier's Magazine* (November 21, 1914) p.24.

> between Unionists and Nationalists, between capital and labor, between the suffragettes and the Government, between man and woman.[29]

Concluding that the war had come at 'the right moment for the women of England' as it gave them a 'stupendous test', we can see that for Sinclair patriotism superseded feminism as the governing principle which the women's movement should adopt during the war.[30] As well as providing an ideal opportunity for women to exercise newly realised rights and duties, Sinclair also articulated the idea that the war would be a catalyst for the rebirth of society in general, and therefore would destroy the decadence that had descended upon English life.

In addition to the article for *Collier's Magazine*, in what remained an unpublished wartime article entitled "The Influence of War on Life and Literature", Sinclair again articulated clearly this belief of war as renewal, asserting that before August 1914:

> Most of us – with the exception of one or two poets – were ceasing to live with any intensity, to believe with any conviction incompatible with comfort, and to feel with any strength and sincerity. Yet we were quite sincerely "out for" reality without recognising it when we saw it and without any suspicion of its spiritual nature. And Reality – naked, shining, intense Reality – more and not less of it, is, I believe, what we are going to get after the War.[31]

As we have seen, we can argue that Sinclair's use of 'Reality' denoted her conception of the spiritual realm. Her philosophical idealism and her rationalisation of the war were deeply intertwined. Believing the war would help re-spiritualise the nation, she repeatedly articulated the maximal modernist notion that it was a transformative event that could destroy decadence within the country's body politic. To highlight some distinctions with the previous case studies, Sinclair's thought was far less politically engaged, when compared with the extensive publicism of guild socialism or Wells. Further, the philosophical critique of

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[29] Ibid. p.25.

[30] For an analysis from a feminist perspective exploring the failures of Sinclair as a feminist ideologue during the war see: Laura Stempel Mumford, 'May Sinclair's *Tree of Heaven*: The Vortex of Feminism, the Community of War' in H. M. Cooper, A. A. Munich and S. M. Squire (eds.), *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Repression* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) pp.168–183.

[31] Raitt, *May Sinclair*, p.150

modern society postulated by Sinclair demonstrated how her thinking was far more meta-political than most of the previous case studies. However, like Wells, this non-fictional work did find clear echoes in her wartime novels, and it is to the synergy between fiction and non-fiction that we now turn.

Wartime fiction

When we turn to the characters and scenarios that Sinclair created in her wartime novels, we see that she developed narratives that promoted the danger and exhilaration of battle, and even idealised the death of soldiers as, potentially, the highest achievements of the human spirit. Further, her fiction presented stark contrasts between the wartime world, where decadence was overcome through voluntary heroism and a new sense of community between the central characters as a result of a single unifying event, and the prewar world, which was described in terms of decline and fall, often by the material and moral developments of modern life subverting the solidity of the moral values of the English bourgeois world.

To begin with *Tasker Jevons*, published in 1916, the novel follows the progress of a young writer, James Tasker Jevons, who marries the rebellious daughter of a conservative and formal society family, Viola Thesiger, after the two run away together to Belgium. The novel is narrated in the first person by Jevons' friend, Walter Furnival, who himself later marries Viola's younger sister, Norah, and remains a close friend of the couple throughout the story. In the years leading up to the war, Jevons experiences growing success as a writer, and, after eloping with their daughter, he is eventually welcomed into the Thesiger family. However, he is never wholly accepted by the Thesigers, especially by Viola's mother and her brother Captain Reggie Thesiger, a graduate from Sandhurst. Despite his successes and superior intellect, Jevons is portrayed as a man with some inescapable flaws, including a level of effeminacy, lack of refinement and taste, and a love for material wealth which is augmented by his literary success. In short, Jevons is presented as a figure who does not conform to the ideals of Edwardian high society, not only in terms of judgment but also heredity; as with similar real life figures, such as Orage and Wells, then, he is a class migrant. Upon the outbreak of war, Jevons tries to acquire a commission, but is frustrated by medical reports that diagnose a heart complaint; bureaucratic structures that find him too old to enlist; and a host of other regulations that connive against his desire to reach Belgium.

Further, the lack of help from the Thesiger family, who do not take his wish to enlist seriously, also frustrate him, especially that of the well connected Captain Thesiger, who is convinced of Jevons's unsuitability for military duty. Jevons himself turns down a job as a war correspondent, and decides that he wants to be a man of action, a war hero, rather than merely write about events.

Eventually, Jevons converts into an ambulance his beloved and luxurious motorcar, previously not so much as taken out if rain was forecast, and ventures into Belgium with his chauffeur. As well as being highly reminiscent of Sinclair's own experiences in Belgium, these final scenes are dominated by emotive descriptions of the plight of Belgium's refugees, thereby invoking a sense of moral purpose from the war. Through this active participation in the war, Jevons gains the military respect that is required for him to be finally accepted into the conservative Thesiger family, and the narrative culminates in his rescuing Captain Thesiger from a burning town hall. As well as this climax, Jevons experiences other moments of danger at the front, and furthermore his treasured car is nearly wrecked in the process. However, the battle scars imbue the vehicle with greater value than it had when Jevons had kept it in pristine condition. Jevons also receives a highly symbolic war wound; his writing hand has to be amputated without anaesthetic after he rescues Captain Thesiger. Viola and her sister Norah also experience danger and excitement at the front, helping Belgian refugees and generally getting close to the dangers of combat. Reflecting Sinclair's belief that, though not fighters, women too had an essential and active role in the war, these passages are a further example of autobiography bleeding into the book's narrative. Regarding Sinclair's spiritual worldview, there is little in this novel to suggest overtly that Sinclair believed war experiences and danger offered a gateway to the transcendental realm. Some passages hint at this point, for example:

> There was a deadly attraction about the thing that made you feel that it and you were the only objects in God's universe, and that you were about to be merged in each other. It looked as if it were rushing out of heaven straight at us, so that we were surprised when it swerved aside and hit the town hall instead.[32]

[32] May Sinclair, *Tasker Jevons* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1916) p.321.

Yet, in comparison to her next war novel, *Tasker Jevons* only provided a minimal exploration of this theme.

The Tree of Heaven from 1917 follows the travails of the Harrison family from the turn of the century to the first years of the war. Mother Frances and her prosperous timber merchant husband, Anthony, have four children: Dorothea, Michael, Nicky and John. Frances and Anthony also bring up another child, Veronica, who is illegitimate: the product of Anthony's sister-in-law Vera and her lover Captain Ferdinand Cameron. One of the novel's central themes is to examine how a sense of change and instability within modern society promotes a decadent culture that denigrates spirituality and the soul. Further, echoing Sinclair's psychoanalytic concerns, the novel examines psychologically the descent into more primitive, herd-like mentalities. These threats are contrasted to the main protagonists' recurring attempts to escape from atavistic forms of existence, a threat repeatedly created by the dynamics of modernity. The ultimate resolution to this problem occurs through the unifying cause of war, and the conflagration is presented as a supreme event offering an ultimate sense of spiritual redemption for all the central characters, especially those who fight at the front.

Before August 1914, each of the Harrison children confront his or her own reading of modernity as flux, and find ways of escaping degeneration of their individuality through various forms of atavism and communal consciousness. To articulate the sensation of individuality degenerating into herd consciousness, Sinclair employs the concept of the vortex. The clearest articulation of this threat of regression into an atavistic state comes when Dorothea, who pursues feminism despite falling in love with the diehard reactionary Frank Drayton, attends her first meeting of the fictional Women's Franchise Union. Here, Dorothea feels that the undemocratic nature of the central committee is destructive of her individual will: keynote speakers force upon the assembled women arguments that are predicated on specious reasoning alongside powerful appeals to emotion that whip up enthusiasm among them. The narrator explains:

> She [Dorothea] was afraid of the herded women. She disliked the excited faces, and the high voices skirling their battle-cries, and the silly business of committees, and the platform slang. She was sick and shy before the tremor and surge of collective feeling; she loathed the gestures and movements of the collective soul, the swaying

> and heaving and rushing forward of the many as one. She would not be carried away with it; she would keep the clearness and hardness of her soul. It was her soul they wanted, these women of the union ... She would fight for freedom, but not in their way and not for their bidding.[33]

As well as the rise of feminism, various other sub-plots explore the variegated forms of cultural and societal change characterising the prewar period. To give some examples, through Michael, a sensitive young man, we enter the world of artistic revolt. He becomes a fervent member of the literary avant-garde after taking up experimental poetry during a short stay in Paris. Michael is encouraged to pursue this direction by Vera's new partner, the enigmatic man of letters, poet, and Irish nationalist Lawrence Stevens, and he soon becomes one of Lawrence's leading disciples. His more technically minded brother, Nicky, not only marries and divorces an unsuitable modern artist, but also helps to invent the tank, thereby allowing Sinclair to highlight through his character both changing moral perspectives and the war's technological revolution. Finally, Veronica's character reflects Sinclair's interest in the supernatural, and is invested with the ability to perform psychic miracles and connect with the spiritual realm. Like much of Wells' fiction, the narrative also uses as a backdrop the rising industrial action of the prewar period, especially in relation to Anthony's timber business, to indicate that increasing class tensions are central to the era's sense of elemental change. Frances' lasting impression of her children's generation is that of a lack of direction when faced by a new world marked by dramatically increased moral and social fluctuation – epitomised by the vortex mentality. Furthermore, she feels that she must let her children go out into this dangerous world and find their own ways, if she is to retain their loyalty.

At a family gathering immediately after the outbreak of war, Anthony proclaims the event to be 'Apocalyptic'. In search of what the war meant to their generation, the children then go to central London, allowing Sinclair to portray the confused, bewildered and above all patriotic crowds that greeted the news of the war's outbreak. The massed throng is described negatively and atavistically as another form of the vortex. It is also invested with some nascent spiritual qualities; for example, the narration describes that 'it was orgiastic; it made strange, fierce noises, like the noises of one enormous, mystically excited beast'.[34] The

[33] Ibid. p.110.
[34] May Sinclair, *The Tree of Heaven* (Cassell and Company, London, 1917) p.247.

wartime vortex, then, is a spiritually lower form of existence. These scenes of the degeneration and confusion of the masses leave Michael with a grudge against this new vortex of patriotic fervour, and he opposes the war. Similarly, Nicky and Veronica decide that the mentality of the crowd is beneath them, and they too are troubled about how to retain their individuality in the face of the new form of atavistic mass consciousness; ultimately, however, they do support the nation's higher cause. Following these scenes, Nicky sends his plans for the tank to the war office and hopes to use his technical skills for the war effort. However, unable to get a commission in order to use his gifted mind, he soon enlists as a private. Still in a mood of protest, Michael proclaims art to have been killed by the conflagration, just as it was achieving a state of renaissance, and he becomes ever more trenchant in rejecting the war. To the dismay of the family, he even has the nerve to publish his poems. This dichotomy between the two brothers' reactions to the war opens up what Sinclair describes as a 'spiritual gap' between them.

The novel then narrates the deaths of the male characters as they volunteer for front line duty. The first to be killed is Frank Drayton. Before his departure to France, feminist Dorothea and reactionary Frank become emotionally reconciled. This is facilitated by the fact that Dorothea, along with women across the land (here echoing Sinclair's stance on the relationship between feminism and the war), decides to suspend her fight for female emancipation. The 'little vortex' of feminism, then, has been subsumed by the 'immense vortex' of the war. Further, before Drayton left for the front, Sinclair explains how, rather than the usual tearful clichés of departure, both Dorothea and Frank feel an intense connection with 'Reality', and this spiritual moment legitimizes his departure to uncertainty, imparting a quality of living out a sense of destiny. Indeed, the war is repeatedly referred to as the 'fight for freedom' in the novel, and so it is a progressive, not regressive, force. Sinclair emphasises this reading by drawing out the irony that the arch reactionary, Drayton, is the first of the novel's male characters to die in combat. Again recalling Sinclair's own experiences, the widowed Dorothea then works for an ambulance unit in Belgium. Following these developments, Anthony and Frances decide that it is their duty to offer all their children to the national cause. Patriotism grows in them, and Sinclair explains that:

> They found that they loved England with a secret, religious, instinctive love. Two feet of English earth, the ground that a man might stand and fight for, became,

> mysteriously and magically, dearer to them than their home. They loved England more than their own life or the lives of their children.[35]

The novel then follows the travails of the two sons, Michael and Nicky. Michael is clear that he rejects the cause of the war for intellectual reasons. Before 1914, he fought alongside the artistic avant-garde to discover new forms for creativity. He would not be drawn into political battles against Germany that he considered to be beneath this 'higher' pursuit. He also continues to fear the dreaded vortex that he sensed was manifested in the fervour of the masses with which the war was greeted, and remains adamant that his individuality must be maintained at all costs. Sinclair narrates that, for Michael, the sense of:

> Collective emotion might be on the side of the archangels or on the side of devils and of swine; its mass was resistant of the private soul. But in his worst dreams Michael could not imagine anything more appalling than the collective patriotism of the British and their Allies, this rushing together of the souls of four countries to make one monstrous soul.[36]

Therefore, the fear of being subsumed by the atavistic vortex was integral to Michael's rejection of the war. However, this fact does not mean that he was a pacifist. Given the opportunity, he would have fought for Irish nationalism alongside Lawrence Stevens because he believed it to be a just cause. However, one by one his avant-garde friends enlist, despite their initial objections. For Michael, this response is epitomised by Lawrence himself, who relinquishes his Irish nationalism in order to fight for Britain. Like all the protagonists who go to the front line, Lawrence does not leave until he can justify the war to himself as a fight for a better future and a war for freedom, and he too is soon killed.

Next to fall is Nicky. Before he departs for the front for the final time, he marries Veronica. His final days are then conveyed through the device of letters home. To Michael he explains how war possesses the quality of a religion, and argues that he too would be converted before the war ended because the power of the righteousness of the cause will be too strong for him to resist. Further, he tells Michael that, as long as one commits one's soul

[35] Ibid. p.282.
[36] Ibid. p.286.

to the war, one will merely be killed in body, not in spirit. Of a sense of spiritual revelation that danger brings, he writes in his final letter to his wife Veronica:

> You're bang up against reality – you're going clean into it – and the sense of it's exquisite. Of course while one part of you is feeling like that, the other half is fighting to kill and doing its best to keep on *this* side reality [sic]. But I've been near enough to the other side to know.[37]

After reading this note, which highlights how the war offered a new access to the transcendent, in the family garden, the spiritually sensitive Veronica sees a ghostly apparition of Nicky. This presence encourages peaceful acceptance of the news of Nicky's death peaceful. It also suggests a spiritual experience not dissimilar to that explored in the chapter on mysticism in *A Defence.*

Following Nicky's death, Michael's final days are then narrated. These draw out his slow realisation that the war is possibly offering him a maximal modernist time of *kairos* because the battlefields will enable him to experience danger and engage with a sense of the heroic. Bearing in mind Sinclair's conception of psychoanalysis, we can see that, through Michael's narrative, she was exploring the psycho-spiritual process of an individual learning to sublimate his Libido into a 'higher' form by accepting the war as a regenerative event for his soul. The only choice is to go to the front line and fight. He travels to the countryside to gain some perspective on events, and to work out how to overcome the vortex of the collective war spirit, a force that he believed was seeking to envelop his 'private soul'. Echoing Sinclair's philosophical position that individuality was not the highest form of existence, the narrator describes how Michael begins to think more clearly, realising that from 'the beginning the thing that had threatened him had been, not the War, but this collective war-spirit, clamouring for his private soul'.[38] His earlier emotional response, which had regarded the war as an atavistic vortex, changes and the narration articulates his revelation that the war was a progressive and spiritual event, not regressive and animalistic. Consequently, he is filled with a new sense of destiny:

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[37] Ibid. pp.323–4.
[38] Ibid. p.330.

> Now that he could look at him by himself he saw how the war might grab hold of you like a religion. It was the Great War of Redemption. And redemption meant simply thousands and millions of men in troop-trains coming from the ends of the world to buy the freedom of the world with their bodies ... He wondered how any sane man could now be a pacifist. And wondering, he felt a reminiscent sting for grief and yearning. But he refused, resolutely, to feel any shame. His religion was also good; and, anyhow, you didn't choose your religion; it chose you.[39]

Like Wells' Britling character, Michael's conversion to an understanding of the 'higher' spiritual qualities of war is followed through step by step. He stops confusing the regressive and degenerate aspects of the collective sensation of the vortex with the progressive, morally correct, and therefore spiritually gratifying, loss of individuality as a soldier. He realises that this is what would close the 'spiritual gap' between his deceased brother and himself. After he enlists, Veronica notes a newfound 'spiritual maturity' in Michael. At the front line, he sees Nicky's tanks in action, receives promotion, and writes war poetry in which he develops the sense of wartime ecstasy as his muse. As with Nicky, Michael's final days are also narrated through the device of letters home, notes that articulate the completion of his spiritual conversion to war. He writes to Veronica thus:

> But you and Nicky and Lawrence are right. It *is* absolutely real. I mean it has to do with absolute reality. With God. It hasn't anything to do with having courage, or not having courage; it's another state of mind altogether. It isn't what Nicky's man said it was – you're not ashamed of it the next day. It isn't excitement; you're not excited. It isn't a tingling in your nerves; they don't tingle. It's all curiously quiet and steady. You remember how you saw Nicky – how everything stood still? And how two times were going on, and you and Nicky were in one time, and Mother was in the other? Well it's like that. Your body and its nerves aren't in it at all. Your body may be moving violently, with other bodies moving violently around it; but *you're* still ... Why should you be so extraordinarily happy? Why should the moment of extreme danger be always so? Why not the moment of safety? Doesn't it look as if danger

[39] Ibid. pp.330–1.

were the point of contact with reality, and death the closest point? You're through. Actually you lay hold on eternal life, and you know it.[40]

He concludes that the revelations in battle are beautiful to him, and that combat and danger are what he had been looking for through his entire life yet never found. It was this liminal state between the material world and ultimate 'Reality' that he had been searching for, and now he has found it. He is soon killed while at the front. The novel ends with the Harrison's final son, John, who is an underdeveloped character in the novel, also leaving for the war.

Like Wells, then, we can see a clear synergy between fiction and non-fiction during the war. However, Sinclair's ideas, drawing on psychoanalysis and idealist philosophy were a world away from Wells' socialism and new religion. Although both writers can be dubbed maximal modernists, clearly they were fundamentally very different authors with diffuse sets of viewpoints. Turning to the critical reception of the novel, Andrew J. Kunka has somewhat simplistically argued that, because the characters in the *Three of Heaven* did not know why they flung themselves into war, the book cannot be regarded as one promoting the war.[41] Clearly, given the fact that this novel argued that front line experiences led to a connection with a 'higher' reality, alongside her endorsement of the heroism of warfare in *A Defence*, and the fact that she promoted this 'higher' reality as a superior way of being, such suggestions appear inaccurate. Rather, to help explain the tragedy of this family's rapture in a collective, spiritualised death wish, we can turn to the line in Sinclair's philosophy already quoted – the 'one Infinite Spirit, then, *is* the finite selves. That the selves are not conscious of this union is the tragedy of their finitude'. Sinclair's narration of the family's response to war articulated fictionally her maximal modernist idea of a psycho-spiritual transcendence of death. The book describes how successive members and associates of the Harrison family rationalised to themselves the embrace of their own deaths in order to achieve connection to a 'higher' realm of spiritual consciousness. In particular, regarding the psychoanalytic subtext revealed through a reading of Sinclair's non-fiction writings on this subject, the Harrison family's acceptance of the war and death can be read as a maximal modernist narrative that presents a higher spiritual reality as the cure for a decadent society. Sinclair's view that individuality is

[40] Ibid. p.347.

[41] See: Andrew J. Kunka "'He isn't Quite an Ordinary Coward": Gender, Cowardice, and Shell Shock in *The Romantic* and *Anne Severn and the Fieldings*' in Andrew J. Kunka and Michele K. Troy (eds.), *May Sinclair: Moving Towards the Modern* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) pp. 237–253, esp. p.250.

not the highest stage of human achievement is reflected in Nicky's emphasis that the war cannot kill you if your soul is fully committed to it, and Sinclair repeated fictionally her belief that, although one's material being will be terminated in death, one's non-material essence would be reborn in a higher reality. Further, the risk manifested when in close proximity to danger and death – and the front line was the epitome of this risk – led to the sensation that one was entering a liminal zone between two planes of existence. For Sinclair, the idea of a generation marching off to death, then, carried the spiritual message that their acceptance of material death would release them to a higher plane of existence. While they lived in the material world, soldiers became revitalised heroes who had escaped decadence by accepting a potentially tragic destiny on the battlefield. Death was the ultimate form of redemption because here one would be relinquished from individuality and be reborn into a higher spiritual order of existence. Women were not given the same possibilities as they were not combatants, and it was far less likely that they could reach the front line. However, they still could achieve an awareness of 'Reality' through their own forms of proximity to danger, such as through ambulance work, as well as through the 'higher' spiritual acceptance of the loss of loved ones. This perspective was unlike any that we have so far encountered in Wells or the pages of *The New Age*, with the battlefield itself becoming the site for regeneration.

Conclusions

To conclude this discussion of Sinclair's wartime thought, it is important to highlight that this discussion has only focused on one aspect of Sinclair's oeuvre: the synergy between her wartime philosophy and the fiction of this period. There is still much work to be done in this field, outside the scope of this study, which includes a full consideration of her second philosophical text, *The New Idealism*, published in 1922. Regarding the relevance of the heuristic model of maximal modernism to Sinclair, there are several points to emphasise regarding the way her wartime writings provided a modernist reading of the war. We can see that Sinclair clearly believed the war represented a profound moment of crisis for Britain. Within this contingent period, the women's movement had to subsume to the national cause its quest for liberation. Nevertheless, the war had become a historic turning point manifesting hope in several ways. Firstly, it was unifying the nation, purging it of many aspects of the culture of decadence and the political crises that had dogged the immediate prewar milieu. Secondly, it represented a chance to re-spiritualize society, a point Sinclair

most clearly articulated through the narratives of personal conversion and redemption comprising her wartime fiction, especially *The Tree of Heaven.* Finally, it would enable women to make some strategic progressions towards greater equality, a development that would benefit all of society.

Consequently, Sinclair's unique reading of the war implied both a 'sense of an ending' and the promise of regeneration and the beginning of a new era, one shored of the decadence characterised by a culture that had lost touch with a true understanding of immortality. We can also see how, both in her philosophy and in her wartime fiction, Sinclair expressed the notion that, through danger, one could experience a revelatory moment and renewed access to the sacred, justifying individual sacrifice. For Sinclair, her reading of the emerging psychoanalytic literature, alongside her development of philosophical idealism, allowed for these revelatory moments to be properly understood for the first time. Therefore, she took a maximal modernist point of view, which asserted that redemption from the antinomies of a decadent modernity required a new understanding of the power of the Libido. In turn, this ultimately needed a new form of mysticism that could be expressed though art and poetry. Such a sense of spiritual renewal through eastern mysticism was very different in content to the case studies examined thus far. As we have seen, this new spirituality characterising Sinclair's idiosyncratic revolt against positivism was clearly articulated in *The Tree of Heaven.* Further, more generally her unique philosophy, which of course is only broadly comparable to other case studies through the maximal modernist paradigm, justified fighting in the war as one of the highest attainments of the human spirit, alongside spiritual asceticism and higher art forms. Therefore, for Sinclair the war offered a novel form of redemption from the antinomies of a modernising society.

Chapter 6: War Poets: 'Sunfire, The Cynic's Lamp, and Faith and Fear'

Having now explored the maximal modernist dynamics of intellectuals based primarily on the home front, away from sustained contact with the trenches, this final chapter plunges us into the thick of front line experiences via Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke. To be clear, these three poets were not modernists in the standard, aesthetic sense, yet their works are sometimes cited by historians as examples of the wider trend that conceived the war as a rupture with the recent past.[1] Consequently, the purpose of this last discussion is to re-examine these three, central war poets through the lens of the maximal modernist ideal type adopted by this study. Having previously briefly encountered one clearly modernist war poet, Herbert Read, who we also saw was an occasional contributor to *The New Age*, we can already assert that aesthetic modernism was not lacking from the body of British war poetry. Rather than exploring aesthetic modernism, however, this final chapter will use the heuristic value of the maximal modernist model to ask research questions of Rosenberg, Sassoon and Brooke – three of the most critically discussed war poets. This questioning will focus attention on how they each conceived the war as a rupture with the recent past, how it signified the epitome of the problems with western society, and how it might even offer a sense of escape from it, thereby presenting a redemptive solution.

As this chapter will demonstrate, each of these poets operated in concord with, rather than in opposition to, a confrontation with a wartime modernity perceived as decadence, a method of contextualising their work that is often neglected in critical analyses of their respective works.[2] Further, by exploring figures not usually considered modernists

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[1] For example, see Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980) ch. 3.

[2] Further, it is worth noting that the literature on the British war poets to date often fails to contextualise their output in a wider European cultural milieu. The three most influential monographs on the subject offering general, critical surveys of the war poets, John H. Johnson's *English Poetry of the First World War: A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1964), Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes Twilight: A Study in the Literature of the Great War* Third Edition (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1996), and Jon Silkin's *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: Arc Paperbacks, 1987), have little to say in this regard. More recently, despite offering often penetrating analyses of the war poets within a British context, analyses such as Adrian Caesar's *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality, and the War Poets: Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), Desmond Graham's *Truth of War: Owen, Blunden, Rosenberg* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), and Fred G. Crawford's *British Poets of the Great War*(Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1988), all continue this trend. Further, many of the biographical accounts of individual war poets present these figures in isolation, in cultural terms largely removed from a European

due to their aesthetic styles, these case studies will move the discussion to the very fringes (indeed, in Brooke's case, over the edge) of the maximal modernist paradigm. By exploring these 'fringe' maximal modernists, we will also once again move beyond simply arguing that each case study unproblematically fits the model; rather the chapter will seek to show how Rosenberg, Sassoon and Brooke possessed characteristics that could also place them outside of the model, thereby not only revealing their unique stances to the war but also the limits of the comparative framework employed by this study.

Before moving onto the cases studies, in terms of drawing out themes pertinent to this study's conception of maximal modernist thought, the most relevant reference point in the secondary literature on this topic is an often neglected lecture from 1961, *Poetry and the First World War*. Here, Maurice Bowra draws into his field of comparison not only French and German examples but also Italian, Greek and Russian experiences, identifying several key patterns that transcended national boundaries. Foremost of these was the tendency to regard the war initially as a form of social or even spiritual renewal, often conceived as an escape from a decadent modernity. Typical was Rilke's celebration of the creatively destructive god of war being unleashed on the world – a view that he later rejected.[3] Regarding the outbreak of war, Bowra notes that Rilke's "Five Songs" takes 'a fierce delight in its breaking of all bonds and its creation of a new, inhuman self';[4] and such a response was an idiosyncratic articulation of the sudden realisation among poets that they belonged to a wider community to which they had bonds of duty that they had to respect. War poets, then, reflected a sudden return of a sense of sacred community that was eroding in the years before the conflagration – themes identified by Wohl, Stromberg and Eksteins as an important aspect of the war's modernist cultural dynamics. As the war drew on, Bowra also highlighted that, across national boundaries, one saw a tension between novel forms of highly politicised, often satirical, poetry and an earlier patriotism that was craven to existing

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context. The treatment of war poetry by literary critics, then, has been marked by a tendency to see the British war poets as remote from their continental cousins. Nevertheless, countering this pattern, cultural histories such as Frank Field's *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), alongside literary studies such as Elizabeth A. Marsland's *The Nation's Cause: French, English and German Poetry of the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1991), F. K. Stanzel and M. Löschnigg (eds.), *Intimate Enemies: English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914 – 1918* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1993), and even Patrick Bridgewater's *The German Poets of the First World War*(London, Croom Helm, 1985), have helped to develop a comparative element to the discourse on this subject.

[3] For more on Rilke's interpretations of the war, see Wolfgang Leppmann (translated by R. M. Stockman and R. Exner), *Rilke: A Life* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1984).

[4] Maurice Bowra, *Poetry and the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) p.11.

duties rather than establishing new rights. In Russia, Alexander Blok can be seen as typical of this growing disillusionment with existing political realities. His "Those Born in the Years of Stagnation" of 1914 already called for radical political change, and his masterpiece from 1918 on the Russian Revolution "The Twelve" sought to convey a sacred dimension to the rebirth of Russia under the new, political modernist Soviet order.[5] From extreme wartime experiences, then, came new poetic statements and stances across Europe, and the war caused poets to rethink their view of the world, opening their eyes to novel forms of modernity. Often, these figures wrote from front line experience, describing the new world of the trenches through a mixture of traditional styles and new voices better suited to articulate the moods and sensations of these new realities.

In the British case, Isaac Rosenberg's letters demonstrate a desire to use the war as a means of creative revitalisation for his aesthetic vision, and the poetry itself both rejects God and one of his playlets even calls for a new Moses figure to symbolise the emergence of a new era. Siegfried Sassoon not only developed an idiosyncratic spiritual response to the war that evoked a sense of sudden break with the prewar past, revealed though diary entries, but also used a radical realistic style to present the trenches as a world of senseless horror that had been created by a morally bankrupt set of political and social elites. He also held sympathies for the political modernism of the Soviet revolution. These aspects of Sassoon's war demonstrate a radical confrontation with a modernity that he came to regard as decadent. Finally, though far from a genuine radical, Rupert Brooke's verse summed up the naïvety of war fever – itself a phenomenon often bound up with the wider maximal modernist milieu among Europe's intellectuals – and so he articulated not only a desire to experience an elemental sense of disjunction with the past, but also hope for a new era. It is these diverse senses of confrontation with a decadent-seeming modernity, rather than the aesthetic modernism of a figure like Read, that is of interest to this final chapter.

Isaac Rosenberg

Beginning this survey of the war poets with Isaac Rosenberg, perhaps the least 'English' of Britain's war poets, as we will see, he was a remarkable and difficult to categorise talent. He enlisted primarily as an escape from poverty, not through any stirring desire to experience

[5] Alexander Blok (Jon Stallworthy Peter France translators) *The Twelve and Other Poems* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970).

the front line and a cosmic, historical event. Not only was Rosenberg horrified by the ugliness and destructive qualities of war, but he also tried to convert these experiences into a new aesthetic vision. Alongside shorter verses, he wrote a series of poems and allegorical playlets that sought to articulate these horrors, often in a mythopoeic register, and with a distinct tendency to frame the war as an act of creative destruction. As he stated to Lawrence Binyon while serving at the front in 1916, he was 'determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting', and was convinced that the war was a formative event in his artistic development, continuing thus: 'I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will refine itself into poetry later on'.[6]

Regarding his background, the Rosenberg family had emigrated from Lithuania in the late 1880s along with many other Jews who were fleeing the growing anti-Semitism of the period. The family settled firstly in Bristol before moving to London in 1897. As a child, Rosenberg demonstrated himself to be a bright student and excelled especially at drawing. Once he left full time education, Rosenberg became an apprentice with an engraver, Carl Hentschel of Fleet Street. Devoting his spare time to enlarging his knowledge of art and culture, Rosenberg often read in Whitechapel Library, and here he made friends with a number of young Jewish figures who collectively became known as the 'Whitechapel Boys'. These included: David Bomberg (later a key member of the Vorticist group), John Rodker (later publisher of Eliot, Pound and Joyce), and Steven Winsten (later editor of the journal *Tomorrow*). The Whitechapel group often also met at Toynbee Hall, a venue which, at that time, hosted many talks by radicals promoting ideologies such as Zionism and Socialism. Though Rosenberg was never directly affected by these ideas, they nevertheless formed a key aspect to the backcloth of his youth.

Eager to improve his artistic abilities, 1907 saw Rosenberg begin evening classes at the London School of Photo-Engraving and Lithography, and also Birkbeck College. Rosenberg worked as an engraver until 1911 when he entered the Slade School of Art. This placed him at one of the most progressive art schools in the country, introducing him to teachers such as Professor Henry Tonks and Professor Brown. Here, Rosenberg was encouraged to experiment with the new styles comprising the avant-garde, especially by friends such as Cubist enthusiast Bomberg, yet Rosenberg idealised artists such as Blake and

[6] Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979) p.248.

Rossetti above the avant-garde impulses of the various schools of post-Impressionism. Indeed, the painter poet tradition was a central ideal for Rosenberg, and, after meeting Lawrence Binyon in 1912, he felt encouraged to publish a small book of poems, *Night and Day*, a set of verse that Isaac had been working on while studying at the Slade. In 1913, Rosenberg made another important contact, Eddie Marsh, who took Rosenberg under his wing, purchasing several of his paintings, introducing him to other poets, and encouraging him to develop a voice much closer to the genteel style of Georgian Poetry. Rosenberg's studies at the Slade ended in 1913, but he was now beginning to experience respiratory problems. Therefore, in March 1914 he travelled to South Africa, following his sister in the hope that the change of climate would lead to an improvement in his health. It was here that he received news of the outbreak of the war.

Turning to some of his prewar writings on the nature and character of art, we can see a number of statements that demonstrate Rosenberg's sensitivity to a sense of profound crisis permeating European culture. The most detailed of these writings was the text for a lecture that he delivered whilst living South Africa. Here, Rosenberg argued that a recognition of the 'multiplexity, and elaborately interwoven texture of modern life', was vital for artists to realise how 'the whole monstrous fabric of modernity is rapidly increasing in complexity, and art, which is a sort of summing up, and intensification of the spirit of the age, increases its aims accordingly'. Demonstrating his debt to Symbolism, he saw art as a phenomenon defined by its possession of a vital impulse, 'a living thing, another nature, a communicable creation'. Its purpose was to 'convey to all, in living language, some floating instant in time, that mixing with the artist's thought and being, has become a durable essence, a separate entity, a portion of eternity'. The influence of Pre-Raphaelites was also clear on Rosenberg's thinking, and he argued that art 'has never received purer or higher utterances than the Italian primitives gave it'. He also praised the Impressionists who had attempted to 'reconquer the active vital spirit, to connect the inner with the outer by means of a more spontaneous and intelligent understanding of the actual'; and also post-Impressionists, who, with 'feverish impatience with the bonds of technique' alongside 'a vehement spontaneity', had 'poured onto canvas their direct visions. Their attempt always for vital rhythms, more vehement and startling connections' demonstrated a 'genuine communion of man's spirit with the universal spirit'. Elsewhere in the lecture, he argued that 'Art is now, as it were, a volcano. Eruptions are continual, and immense cities of culture at

its foot are shaken and shivered'. So profound was the sense of chaos that, literally according to Rosenberg, the 'roots of a dead universe are torn up by hands, feverish and consuming with an exuberant vitality – and amid dynamic threatenings we watch the hastening of the corroding doom'.[7] As we will see, this image of uprooting would be developed throughout his wartime verse.

In other writings too, Rosenberg wrote about how a sense of immanent apocalypse was a central characteristic of the modern artistic imagination. For example, in a short essay praising the poetry of Ralph Waldo Emerson, he argued that the 'ebullition of the heart that seeks in novel but exact metaphor to express itself, the strong but delicate apocalyptic imagination that startles and suggests the inward sanity that controls and directs' were 'the mainsprings of true poetry'[8] – an aesthetic sensitivity to the apocalyptic not untypical at the time in Europe. In another fragment on aesthetics, titled "On Modern Art", Rosenberg expressed his sensitivity to decadent qualities manifest within the capitalist mindset, which were overtaking the more fragile, spiritual qualities of the imagination, the core role of art. 'Civilization', he argued, 'has been tamed by the commercial spirit, a logic without imagination, mechanical, scientific, practical. Impetuous ideals, Art has become too self-conscious.' He continued this point by describing the ultimate victory of imagination over corrosive materialism:

> The sky stagnates, life becomes inert, arid, a perishing tomb for itself. Dust are the stars, dust the sun, the whole world dust. Obscured and effaced, the life force fails and like a pricked balloon subsides. Out of this nothingness, out of this dust, art is born and philosophies.

Rosenberg then asserted once more the existence of the separate, but very real, world of the imagination thus:

> Life stales and dulls, the mind demands noble excitement, half apprehended surprises, the eternal desire, the beautiful. It is a vain belief that Art and life go hand

[7] "Art", in ibid. pp.289–297.
[8] "Emerson" in ibid. pp.288–289.

in hand, Art is as it were another planet, which does indeed reflect the rays of life, but is nevertheless a distinct and separate planet.[9]

As with many European artists, then, Rosenberg was alert to the concerns of modernity, and was certainly a figure seeking to transmit this sense of crisis manifest within the modern world into a 'higher' aesthetic vision. Through this sophisticated appreciation of modernity's decadence, and the need for art to engage with the crisis, we can already identify maximal modernist qualities in the prewar Rosenberg.

Still in South Africa when the news broke, Rosenberg's initial thoughts on the war demonstrated the common theme of hope for cultural renewal, typical of many outpourings by Europeans in August 1914. For example, if we look at "On Receiving News of the War", the outbreak of the conflagration is presented as a sudden winter descending on a summer landscape, and 'In all men's hearts it is. / Some spirit old / Hath turned with malign kiss / Our lives to mould'. From this decline, caused by a rediscovered primitive force, the poem concludes with the following pessimistic yet hopeful idea claiming the spilling of blood will lead to a new era: 'O! ancient crimson curse! / Corrode, consume. / Give back this universe / Its pristine bloom'.[10] "Dead Heroes" is more overtly patriotic, arguing that the blood of soldiers 'is England's heart; / By their dead hands / It is their noble part / That England Stands', and they have given up their lives 'to win immortality / And claim God's kiss'.[11] As with Rilke, then, even the most intelligent of poetic minds could be susceptible to the naïve rhetoric of war as idealised renewal. Rosenberg continued to see the war as an event capable of inculcating profound change, but was soon able to offer far more nuanced and satisfying artistic representations of its horrors and spiritual meaning.

To begin exploring this attitude with one of his most ambitious wartime pieces, the experimental allegorical playlet "Moses",[12] here we can see how Rosenberg refracts a meditation on the moral use of violence through a Biblically inspired narrative, one predicated on the decay of an old system of values, and the potential for a sense of renewal. Rosenberg began writing "Moses" around the time he joined the army, in October 1915, and it was completed in May 1916. The plot's elaboration of the Moses story is esoteric: Moses

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[9] "On Modern Art" in ibid., p.299.
[10] Ibid. p.75.
[11] Ibid. p.92.
[12] Ibid. pp.138–151.

murders a slave overseer, Abinoah, because he learns of Moses' incestuous relationship with his own sister, Miriam. Further, Abinoah's daughter, Koelue, has been betrayed by Moses and so she takes a new lover, Prince Imra. The playlet ends with Moses killing Abinoah, while Prince Imra's cohorts come to arrest Moses – it is no wonder that Eddie Marsh criticised heavily the playlet's obscurity! This plot aside, much of the playlet's poetic dynamism comes from Moses' realisation for the imminent need for fundamental change and renewal to occur, and it documents how he grasps the fact that he needs to lead the enslaved Hebrews from Egypt and into a new world. The story begins during a famine, and with Moses learning of a new edict from his adoptive father, the Pharaoh, ordering that the molar teeth must be pulled from all slaves in order to stop them eating what precious food remains. This idea horrifies Moses, and he rages:

> See in my brain
> What madmen have rushed through
> And like a tornado
> Torn up the tight roots
> Of some dead universe.
> The old clay is broken
> For a power to soak in and knit
> It all into tougher tissues
> To hold life,
> Pricking my nerves till the brain might crack,
> It boils to my finger-tips,
> Till my hands ache to grip
> The hammer – the lone hammer
> That breaks lives onto a road
> Through which my genius drives.

Here, in terms of images evoking creative destruction, we move from a raging tornado, to uprooting, to a dead universe, to a search for renewed toughness of knitted tissue, to a destroying hammer, to a road, and finally to the idea that a genius is guiding this powerful force. Such overlaying of evocative images to express a larger idea is typical of Rosenberg's

poetic style, resulting in intensely constructed verses, as this extract typifies. In short, Rosenberg's Moses is a figure drenched in vitality and creative qualities, and the first scene depicts his realisation of his destiny to summon up a rebellion among the slaves. Moses also contrasts his vision for renewal with the degenerate world of the Egyptians. He argues that he is sickened by the existence of 'priests and forms, / This rigid dry boned refinement', and he feels that Egypt is polluted not merely by the decadent perfumes of Egyptian ladies, which are 'obnoxious to stern natures', but also by nothing less than the 'miasma of a rotting god'. The realisation of the verve required to create the world anew, articulated by Moses in this first scene, is repeatedly juxtaposed with a sense of moral inferiority and tyranny incarnate in the Pharaoh's Egypt. In a speech concluding the first of the playlet's two scenes, and directed to his lover, Koelue, Moses again articulates his will to be his own master, 'Ah! I will ride the dizzy beast of the world / My road – my way'.

The second scene begins with two Hebrew slaves discussing the need for Moses to become their saviour, the younger is the most hopeful of the pair. Abinoah enters the scene, high on hashish, and senselessly beats the older of the two slaves. Drugged and violent, then, the slave overseer epitomises the decadent and corrupt qualities of Egyptian society, as described by Moses in the playlet's first scene. Moses, disguised as a minstrel, enters and Abinoah discusses with Moses his deep-seated hatred of the Jews, only for the minstrel to reveal his true identity. Both are in a rage by this point, and Abinoah informs Moses that Prince Imra knows of Moses' new lover, and so the playlet climaxes with Moses killing Abinoah. To murder Abinoah is an act that symbolically destroys any lingering ties of loyalty that Moses has with Egypt. Further, the implication of the murder is to demonstrate that Moses could claim moral justification in killing Abinoah, an ethical endorsement of the use of violence. As a reader, one is not directly informed of Moses' reasoning in this final act, rather we are encouraged to identify with his emotive responses, especially his desire to kill the anti-Semitic and brutal slave overseer. Just before symbolically killing Abinoah, we again find Moses describing the transformation of base qualities of humans into more refined and civilised ones:

> So grandly fashion these rude elements
> Into some newer nature, a consciousness
> Like naked light seizing the all-eyed soul,

Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until they take it thus – or die.

Clearly, "Moses" is a complex work, both in terms of ideas, and its poetic forms. Unsurprisingly, its critical reception has been mixed. For example, Bernard Bergonzi dismisses it as lacking any real internal coherence,[13] whereas, recognising it as a complete piece worthy of criticism, Jon Silkin discusses "Moses" at length.[14] Whatever its literary merits, as a document produced by an artist attempting to refract the experiences of the war through a mythopoeic lens, the piece clearly fits the maximal modernist, palingenetic register of interest to this study. However, reading this work solely through the lens of maximal modernism does not do the poem full justice. The centrepiece of the work was the Moses character. Here, Rosenberg creates a superman figure who is not merely imbued with a powerful physique, given a strong moral vision, and an intuitive ability to see a new world emerging from a decadent and decaying one, but is specifically sensitive to the dying of an old god, inspiring painful yet regenerative, revolutionary action. These qualities work as a cluster of character traits that result in a radical, spiritually sensitive figure who, through force of personality and willpower, is capable of engendering rebirth. The playlet, then, acknowledges that profound change could only occur as a result of suffering. Moses does represent genuine hope; after all, the Moses story, if not Rosenberg's play itself, does end with the creation of a new world for the slaves of Egypt. One should not be distracted by the fact that "Moses" is not a piece of realistic verse describing the trenches. Its concern with the war is to capture Rosenberg's underlying, metaphysical sense of this situation. In this context, it is worth noting that, after he joined the army, Rosenberg increasingly identified with his Jewish roots.[15] Not only did he receive a great deal of anti-Semitic abuse in the army, but, as he wrote to Lascelles Abercrombie, 'Believe me the army is the most detestable invention on this earth and nobody but a private in the army knows what it is to be a slave'.[16] Rosenberg, then, had good reasons to feel himself to be akin to a slave, and cried out for his own Moses to usher in a new era. Among Rosenberg's war poems this work

[13] Bergonzi, *Heroes Twilight*, p.116.
[14] See: Silkin, *Out of Battle*, ch.10.
[15] Rosenberg wrote several other poems that were an overt response to his Jewish identity: "The Jew", "The Burning of the Temple", "The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Hordes", and "Through these Pale Cold Days".
[16] Rosenberg, *The Collected* Works, p.230.

probably offers us the closest fit to the maximal modernist model; elsewhere, his diverse range of topics extended beyond such engagement with the theme of war as regeneration, as we will see.

Unsurprisingly to the reader of "Moses", in his various poetic discussions concerning religion, Rosenberg was far from complimentary regarding God. Again we see attempts to develop rebellious stances. Two poems, "God Made Blind" and "God", demonstrate this point clearly. In the former poem, Rosenberg seeks to articulate the idea that one can cheat God, a God with the capacity to hate that is, by outwardly appearing to be burdened with all the misery that one can bear, whilst inwardly developing within oneself a hidden sense of joy, which he describes as love. Because of the tension between this outer appearance of misery and the secret 'inner' love, eventually the 'inner' feeling will burst out, a force as powerful as that of God himself. To Marsh he wrote, 'we have grown into love, which is the rays of that Eternity of which God is the sun. We have become God himself. Can God hate and do wrong to himself?'[17] Clearly, from the perspective of the ideal type of maximal modernist thought employed by this study, there are rebellious qualities to this idea, radically confronting a decadent modernity, specifically here in highlighting the power of humans to usurp the authority of an existing God, alongside an affirming sense that change and spiritual regeneration need to occur from within the self. Further, the emergence of a new God from this 'inner' love is also intimately linked with external appearances of suffering. In "God", Rosenberg rejects conventional notions of God in more fulsome terms – for example, claiming that 'his body lodged a rat where men nursed souls', and 'On fragments of an old shrunk power, / On shy and mimed, on women wrung awry, / he lay, a bullying hulk, to crush them more'. The poem concludes by underscoring the decadence that Rosenberg felt characterised the divinity: 'Ah! This miasma of a rotting God!'[18] Jon Silkin has commented on the way in which Rosenberg's degradation of God, the miasma created by the decay of His power, 'is to change the character of the authority (if indeed it is to be kept at all) and one's relationship with it'.[19] The trope of profound metaphysical dislocation from received religious notions, combined with an identification of a decadent, rotting God, then, are important maximal modernist qualities manifest within Rosenberg's poetic vision. He never

[17] Ibid. p.210.
[18] Ibid. p.93.
[19] Silkin, *Out of Battle*, p.270.

developed a working rationale regarding his religious outlook, so, unsurprisingly, many of his wartime poems are exploratory regarding their attitudes towards religion.

This resulted in various experimentations with the development of personal mythology, often with a great deal of originality. Probably the clearest demonstration of this pattern from his shorter verses is "Daughters of War", which was also one of his favourite war poems. In a letter to Marsh, he stated that he had 'striven to get that sense of inexorableness the human (or inhuman) side of this war has'.[20] The poem recounts some 'prophetic gleams' of a soldier who, in a 'higher' state of consciousness, sees a series of Amazonian female gods. While performing what appears to be a fertility dance, they 'Beckon each soul aghast from its crimson corpse / To mix in their glittering dances'. These goddesses live by imbibing the souls of dead soldiers; Rosenberg's 'ever-living Amazons', then, were truly terrifying creations, denying immortality to the fallen. This is contrasted powerfully with the peaceful realm before the war's outbreak. For example, the third stanza begins by stating: 'We were satisfied of our lords the moon and the sun / To take our wage of sleep and bread and warmth'. Into this calm world the Daughters of war had stormed:

> Driving the darkness into the flame of day,
> With the Amazonian wind of them
> Over our corroding faces
> That must be broken – broken for evermore
> So the soul can leap out
> Into their huge embraces.

The poem concludes with one of these 'daughters of war' explaining to the prophetic soldier her own part in this grizzly process.[21] "Daughters of War" allows Rosenberg to develop a number of issues regarding the atmosphere of the war: the closeness of death; the dramatic sense of division between wartime and peacetime; personification of the supra-human scale of the human destruction involved; and, through the use of female, pagan deities, offer an articulation of the war's underlying meaning in a metaphysical structure that is decidedly antagonistic to orthodox Jewish teachings. Clearly, thoughts regarding regeneration

[20] Rosenberg, *The Collected Works*, p.260.
[21] Ibid. pp.112–3.

entertained by Rosenberg during the war, as expressed in "Moses" for example, were commingled with attempts to describe profound suffering and horror in metaphysical terms. Indeed, although this moves our analysis outside of the theme of war as regeneration, this shift in the later wartime poems by Rosenberg is important to document. The heuristic value of reading Rosenberg's work through the lens of maximal modernism, then, can be found in highlighting where he deviates from the concept of regenerative war, as well as where he accentuates it.

This more general sense of dislocation from semblances of normality is again articulated in "Break of Day in the Trenches". Here, we are reminded by the poem of the freedom of a rat to jump between English and German trenches, a quality lacking among soldiers. This 'queer sardonic rat' seemed to 'inwardly grin' as it passed between enemy trenches, feeding off the dead. Here, we see an accentuation of Rosenberg's sensitivity to the anomic world of the trenches, a realm also pungent with the fumes of a 'rotting' God. It is not so much the rat's superior adaptation to life within the trench environment, but the way it mocks the poem's protagonist, that underscores Rosenberg's sensitivity to a profoundly unsettling decadence pervading his environment. As we have seen in his God poems, such messages are an impetus, not in a crudely propagandistic sense, but in a more refined artistic tone, directing the reader to consider the validity of his or her own received values regarding God, and to question the acceptance of a world where something so awful could be allowed to occur by human or 'higher' powers. Consequently, either there is a God who is ultimately responsible for the war and who is cruel enough to allow such a thing to occur, or there is no God, and mankind has gone mad. Neither are particularly tolerable scenarios. Further, specifically regarding the break of day itself, this is characterised by 'the same old druid Time as ever', which may also be a hint of his desire for access to a 'higher' sense of time, unavailable in the 'base' trenches.[22]

The idea of the trenches as a symbol of humanity's descent from civilisation to a more primitive existence is also evoked in two poems on lice. Like many soldiers, Rosenberg's clothes were soon infested with lice, leading to bites and gaping sores that would not heal. As in "Break of Day", "The Immortals" portrays vermin as the more adapted life-form to the war conditions, and concludes that these insects were truly manifestations of the devil. "Louse Hunting" describes soldiers who would rather burn some

[22] Ibid. pp.103–4.

of their clothes for some warmth rather than continue to wear them, so bad had the infestation become. To accentuate the descent to a primitive nature by solders, Rosenberg presents this scene in ritualistic tones:

> Nudes – stark and glistening,
> Yelling in lurid glee. Grinning faces
> And raging limbs
> Whirl over the floor one fire.
> For a shirt verminously busy
> Yon soldier tore from his throat, with oaths
> Godhead would shrink at, but not the lice.[23]

Again, this poem has more to say than merely confirming Rosenberg's maximal modernist qualities. The evocation of ritual and regression, and the sense that animals are more adapted to wartime conditions than humans, each demonstrated Rosenberg's poetic representation of the senselessness of the trenches, a modernised form of abject human misery.

The idea that the war had opened up a living hell (one might argue in retrospect from a researcher guided by the maximal modernist ideal type an instance of a decadent modernity) was perhaps best expressed in "Dead Man's Dump". Here, the sense of a rupture in metaphysical certainties unleashed by the war, and articulations of the material horrors, are fused in one of Rosenberg's most powerful war poems. To achieve this, "Dead Man's Dump" combines the descriptive style of "Break of Day in the Trenches" with sensitivity to metaphysical questioning, as expressed in works such as "Daughters of War". Following the first two stanzas, which plunge the reader into a grizzly world populated by the bodies of the dead huddled silently together, the third stanza begins a more reflective section. Regarding the dead, it is stated that 'Earth has waited for them', and that the ground was destined to swallow up their souls. Rosenberg, then, reiterates the trope of an enigmatic, 'higher' force feeding from the souls of the fallen. Lamenting their loss, and in an essentially questioning tone, stanza four continues thus: 'Earth! Have they gone into you? / Somewhere they must have gone, and flung on your hard back / is their souls' sack, / Emptied of God-ancestralled essences'. The fifth stanza despairs of the fact that one cannot see the migration of souls

[23] Ibid. pp.108.

after death. Therefore, no-one can answer crucial questions concerning the destination of the vital impulse, the animating quality of human life, after its departure from the human body. The sixth stanza follows this point by describing the strange feeling of immortality among those who lived on and were surrounded by death; in this stark world, Rosenberg suggests, it is almost as if one is either dead or immortal. The seventh stanza both augments this sensation and also depicts the plight of the wounded, who alone could dream hopefully of retuning home.

The poem concludes with a further four stanzas returning the reader to the horrific realities of the battlefield. Death is terrifyingly close in these final verses. We read of a body of the dead 'burned black by strange decay', and the poem ends with the last cries of a dying man 'beating for light'.[24] There is virtually nothing to suggest a regenerative, hope sustaining subtext. All that the poem really offers to its reader in relation to this issue is a grim articulation of the emotional stresses involved in existing within such a milieu; a questioning of the metaphysical journey made by the souls of the dead, the earth having sucked out their spirits; and the eerie qualities of those left behind to wonder at such unanswerable inquiries, all of which creates a sense that one is profoundly dislocated from any semblance of normality. If "Moses" had offered hope, extended exposure to the war resulted in Rosenberg revising this vision and replacing it with articulations, through realistic and mythopoeic registers, of the chaos and terror war had introduced into the world. The emphasis in the later war poems was firmly on the all-encompassing sense of destruction rather than new creation, yet the drive to create artistic expression from such horror nevertheless testifies to Rosenberg's commitment to distil a novel aesthetic perspective from his wartime experiences. What we are seeing through the lens of Rosenberg's work is the way that exposure to the trenches could dislocate writers from the more naïve visions of war as regeneration, as presented by those operating at some distance from the front line. Although there are still evocations of war as a liminal, transitory experience, the future disappears and the focus is increasingly on the present, extreme nature of human experience.

To finish this survey of Rosenberg's wartime poems, it is also worth highlighting that he left uncompleted a further playlet, with drafts initially titled "The Amulet" and later "The Unicorn". Here we can see the trend of viewing war from the front as a liminal experience, though without any sense of ultimate regeneration. The central motif of the piece was a

[24] Ibid pp.109–11.

reconfiguration of the idea of the 'Rape of the Sabine Women' to engage with themes of being uprooted by powerful forces, and the sense of a profound destabilisation of society brought about by the war. To one longstanding friend he stated: 'I mean to put all my innermost experiences into the "Unicorn". I want it to symbolize the war and all the devastating forces let loose by ambitious and unscrupulous will.'[25] As with "Moses", the drama is located in a Biblical setting, and again it possesses an obscure plot. The premise of the story runs as follows: Tel, the leader of a wandering tribe, who are dying as they have no women members to reproduce their population, breaks up the peaceful world of an everyday village, with the drama focusing on one husband and wife, Saul and Lilith. It ends with Tel carrying Lilith away, and with a depiction of the destruction of the village as a result of the wandering tribe stealing the village's women. Tel also symbolises the destructive will of the war.

In a draft of "The Unicorn" published in Rosenberg's *Collected Works*[26] and completed a few days before his death, the story begins *in media res* with Saul caught in a raging storm, his wagon trapped in a muddy quagmire, and lightening flashing all around him. He is terrified and has twice seen a ghostly unicorn rush by him. He yearns for the safety of his home and to be with his wife, yet also contemplates his own demise in the horrors that surround him:

> Sick... Sick... I will lie down and die. How can I die?
> Kind lightening, sweetest lightening, cleave me through
> Lift up these shreds of being and mix me with
> This wind, this darkness.

As Saul attempts again to free his wagon, Tel appears and the pair free the cart. Tel then drives them both to Saul's house, while Saul continues to describe in detail his fear and anguish, now augmented by the presence of the unknown giant who had saved him ('some Amazon's son doubtless / from the dark countries'), alongside the horrors he had seen when he went to the town earlier that day to buy provisions. There, he had witnessed the invasion by Tel's tribe, and he remembers especially the 'folk wailing; and men who could not weep',

[25] Ibid. p.270.
[26] Ibid. pp.167–73.

before seeing the unicorn, a symbol of the energetic masculinity and will to action that is lacking in Saul's pacific character, run towards his own house. We now realise that Saul is also deeply concerned for his wife's safety. Articulating his torment, he continues:

> But God's unthinkable imagination
> Invents new tortures for nature
> Whose wisdom falters here.
> No used experience can make aware
> The imminent unknowable.
> Sudden destruction
> Till the stricken soul wails in anguish
> Torn here and there.

In this draft of the playlet, Rosenberg deliberately holds back aspects of the plot, and it is only now that we learn that Saul has actually returned Tel to Lilith, so the husband unwittingly becomes complicit in his wife's fate. Having never encountered a woman before, Tel had fled from an initial attempt to abduct Lilith moments before, only then to meet with Saul. Consequently, once Saul and Tel arrive at Saul's home, Lilith is also terrified, and profoundly aware of the trauma afflicting the town. Echoing Rosenberg's sensitivity to modernity as a deracinating force, she claims:

> The roots of a torn universe are wrenched,
> See the bent trees like masts of derelicts in ocean
> That beats upon this house this ark.

And regarding the horror and chaos of Tel's presence, the personification of all the war's terrors, she continues: 'I fear him, his hungry eyes / Burn into me, like those balls of fire'. All the passive Saul can do is look on at the horror of the destruction of any semblance of normality. He sees outside numerous mythic animals ridden by Tel's men, each one clutching one of the town's women, with the unicorn leading the parade of destruction. Tel then takes Lilith, now unconscious, and mounts the unicorn. Meanwhile, Saul and his

brother in law Enoch both jump into a nearby well, probably indicating that they are committing suicide.

Like "Moses", "The Unicorn" is a complex playlet seeking to transform wartime experiences into a mythopoeic and symbolic form. Although the concern is no longer with creating a heroic new man, as was the case with "Moses", we can still use the maximal modernist ideal type constructively in analysing the piece. Although offering little hope for a sense of redemption via the violence in the playlet, Rosenberg was clearly evoking a sense of an ending for the stable and orderly life of Saul and Lilith's townsfolk, who have their lives ripped apart by an invading horde. As in "Daughters of War", then, humans are destroyed by forces of war more powerful than them. Rilke's god of war is revealed in all its terribleness. The device of the raging storm, referred to throughout the playlet, helps to evoke a liminal state for both the townsfolk and for the invaders, as does Lilith's reference to 'the roots of a torn universe' being 'wrenched' – one of Rosenberg's characteristic tropes. It is this focus on an unresolved sense of liminality where we find the maximal modernist model useful. The war was creating a seemingly irresolvable crisis, transition was central, but to what new form and why were not clear. Therefore, war becomes liminal and confusing, rather than redemptive and meaningful. Jon Silkin has provided the lengthiest critical appraisal of the unfinished piece, and regards it as a work 'concerned with war and with the prewar situation of imminent change'.[27] Echoing Silkin's comments, "The Unicorn", alongside the earlier drafts, can be read as a playlet in which Rosenberg sought to articulate these two themes. By using allegory, he employs a register that transcends the particular realities of the trenches, and, like "Moses", symbolically presents a sense of the roots of a universe being torn apart. This was another effort to create a work with a mythical cadence that attempts to capture allegorically the qualities of the war. It describes a seemingly chaotic, hellish transformation inflicted by forces outside of the everyday imagination of the villagers, leaving its inhabitants in a liminal state. Indeed, the war itself was often outside the imagination of the mass of European society.

Rosenberg's artistic vision regarding the war, then, was predicated on a number of themes, one of the strongest of these was the destruction of the world, and the need for a new reality to emerge from this violence. Key tropes representing this theme included: the sense that God has become a decadent figure, expressed strongly in "Moses", "God" and

[27] Silkin, *Out of Battle*, p.314.

"God Made Blind"; the terrors of the front line that almost beggared description, for example in "Dead Man's Dump" and allegorically in "The Unicorn"; and attempts to develop a new mythology to comprehend these horrors, "Daughters of War" was, amongst his shorter verse, the most articulate poem in this regard. We can see the theme of destruction and regeneration most clearly in his two allegorical playlets, which were both predicated on this idea. Further, by interpreting this output through Rosenberg's ideas on the nature of art as expressed before the war – especially his exposure to the various currents of European modernism and his deep concern to connect with a 'higher' artistic sense of reality over and above material decadence – we can appreciate that he saw European culture before the war coming to terms with what he regarded as the profound calamity of modernity, and so the war itself became an apocalyptic event that writ large this sense of elemental crisis.

Regarding a maximal modernist desire for cultural rebirth, his poems argued initially that the war itself had the potential to inculcate renewal, although only via human suffering and violence. Increasingly, variations of this trope waned, and were replaced with more intense expressions of the terror that pervaded trench warfare, and so it is less straightforward to identify Rosenberg as a maximal modernist. Existential questioning on the crisis of liminality evoked by the war, then, replaced answers. Therefore, whereas "Moses" offered hope, "The Unicorn" articulated despair at the continuance of the war's terror and destruction. Rosenberg's ability to evoke a new sense of *kairos* to combat the horrors of the war waned as his wartime experiences continued. His focus veered more towards the 'sense of an ending', rather than the theme of the emergence of new era, as the war progressed. This trend is an important one to be sensitive to. Rather than merely taking "Moses" as a clear example of maximal modernism, we must recognise the limits to which Rosenberg was interested in these themes, and as the war progressed shifted to view the war less in terms of potential redemption and more in terms of inescapable liminality. Although he did hope for some form of regeneration while at the front (as he stated in one wartime letter: 'One might succumb[,] be destroyed – but one might also (and the chances are even greater for it) be renewed, made large, healthier'[28]), his later poetry represented the questions and confusions created by exposure to the trenches, rather than presenting war as an experience with a potentially positive resolution.

[28] Rosenberg, *The Collected Works*, p.223–4.

Siegfried Sassoon

Siegfried Sassoon is perhaps the most notorious of the British war poets, due primarily to his protest in 1917. Further, his two wartime volumes of largely realistic poetry, and his subsequent fictional memoirs[29] and autobiographical volumes[30] of the war years have resulted in a popular impression of Sassoon as a pacifist figure. Those familiar with the nuances of the poet's wartime story will already understand that Sassoon was a far more complex personality than this. As with Rosenberg, exploration of Sassoon through the lens of maximal modernism helps us to understand some of the poet's complexity, but such an approach does not give us a complete picture of this multifaceted figure. Sassoon's initial experiences of warfare were often positive, whereas his later anger was directed against what he saw as the senselessness regarding the way it was being prosecuted by politicians and understood by the majority of civilians. His published dairies also reveal how Sassoon felt a sense of personal regeneration while at the front, an environment which possessed a mysterious, alluring quality for him throughout the war.

As in Rosenberg's case, Sassoon also came from a Jewish background. However, unlike Rosenberg's life of poverty in the East End of London, Sassoon was born into a wealthy, well-connected family. His Jewish father, Alfred, came from a family of international merchants, whereas his mother, Georgiana Theresa Thornycroft, came from an artistic, Anglican background. Sassoon was always vaguely conscious of his 'alien' heritage, though he never appears to have embraced a Jewish identity in a positive manner. Indeed, Sassoon was educated at home until the age of 14, and here he absorbed a diet of Anglicanism and Empire. His poetic interests began with a love of the Romantics, the Pre-Raphaelites and Swinburne. Later, he attended Marlborough College before studying law at Clare College, Cambridge, though he did not get a degree. Following this, Sassoon spent much of his prewar life in Kent, living a privileged lifestyle, often foxhunting or playing cricket. He also published several volumes of privately printed poetry. Deprived of intellectual company, he was persuaded by Eddie Marsh to move to London in 1914 to develop his career as a poet.

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[29] Siegfred Sassoon, *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937).
[30] Siegfried Sassoon, *The Old Century and Seven More Years* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938); *The Weald of Youth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942); and *Siegfried's Journey, 1916 – 1920* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945).

The prewar Sassoon was something of a split personality. On the one hand, he yearned for a simplistic, un-intellectual, sporting persona (epitomised by his alter ego in his fictional war memoirs, George Sherston); yet on the other, he pursued his interest in writing poetry, a more 'degenerate' characteristic. In prewar Britain, these poles were difficult to resolve, and Sassoon appears to have been content to compartmentalise the contrary aspects of his personality, depending upon what company he was in. The latter trait was further confused by the realisation of his homosexuality. Indeed, he corresponded with Edward Carpenter, and even discovered that, alongside himself, his elder brother Hamo was also what Carpenter's theory of sexual identity defined as a 'Uranian'. This dichotomy between personas of the virile sportsman and the decadent poet was temporarily resolved during the war, as the experiences of the army allowed him to unify an adventurous comportment with his poetic progression. He also developed idealised crushes on fellow soldiers; indeed it was not until the death in combat of one of these Platonic lovers, David Thomas, in March 1916 that he developed any real anger towards Germans.[31] Further, the war gave him powerful subject matter, a quality that his poetry to that point had desperately lacked.

Eager to take part even before it was officially declared in Britain, Sassoon's war began when he joined the Sussex Yeomanry on 3 August 1914. In May of 1915, he transferred to the Royal Welch Fusiliers and was sent to France in November 1915. We can turn to Sassoon's diaries in order to piece together his opinions regarding various aspects of modern warfare from this time. As Adrian Caesar has noted,[32] by reading entries from late 1915, we soon discover that his initial responses to being stationed at the front line were broadly positive. However, focusing on Sassoon's sexual identity, Caesar's analysis fails to bring out fully how Sassoon also conceived this period as a spiritually enlightening experience. Therefore, it is worth looking in some detail at Sassoon the 'Happy Warrior', to use his own phrase, to see how a new, nebulous and spiritually-informed sense of reality was discussed in his diary. Epitomising this attitude, one diary entry for the 3 December 1915 reads as follows:

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[31] See: Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, 1915 – 1918* (London: Faber & Faber, 1983) p.52.
[32] See: Adrian Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality, and the War Poets: Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) ch.3.

> My inner life is far more real than the hideous realism of this land of the war-zone. I never thought to find such peace. If it were not for Mother and friends I would prey for a speedy death. I want a genuine taste of the horrors, and then – peace. I don't want to go back to the old inane life which always seemed like a prison. I want freedom, not comfort. I have seen beauty in life, in men and things; but I can never be a great poet, or a great lover. The last fifteen months have unsealed my eyes.[33]

There are several interesting points to be made here. Most obviously, Sassoon regarded his new life in terms of an 'internal', spiritual experience over and above a material one, and welcomed this break though as an intensification of the 'inner' self. Given his artist credentials writing in the romantic tradition, it is also interesting to note that he claimed to have specifically seen beauty in army life. Regarding a sense of regeneration through war, this was also clearly articulated. The prewar world was a 'prison', whereas in the army he had found 'peace', a state that could be further augmented through death. Sacrifice, regeneration and a sense of connecting with a 'higher' reality were, therefore, all present at this point in Sassoon's war. The entry for 17 December continued this tone thus: 'I am happy, happy; I've escaped and found peace unbelievable in this extraordinary existence which I thought I should loath. The actual life is mechanical; and my dreams are mine, more lonely than ever.'[34] Tropes of newfound 'inner' freedom, joy in loneliness, and a sense of exile leading to a greater connection with nebulous spiritual ideas were articulated in his diary entries throughout the war.

Early the following year, we can find further instances of the elision between sacrifice and renewal. On 9 January, for example, he stated: 'My voice shall ring through the great wood, because I am glad for a while with beautiful earth, and we who live here are doomed to fall as befits a man, a sacrifice to the spring; and this is true and we all know it – that many of us will die before Easter'.[35] Building on this interpretation of death as a sacrificial act, and echoing May Sinclair's identification of a link between mystical 'Reality' and a heroic embrace of danger, on the 26 January, Sassoon continued thus: 'I am fortunate to come to the blessed state of mind where earth and light are one; I suppose it is what

[33] Sassoon, *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries*, p.22.
[34] Ibid. p.26.
[35] Ibid. p.33.

mystics call finding Reality. I am part of the earth which for me is soaked in the glory of sunlight and past seasons – "sleep, and sunshine, and the autumnal earth" as R.B. says.[36] Like Sinclair, then, Sassoon at this point appears to value this spiritual sense of a higher reality above the destruction manifest in the material realm. Of course, this was not informed by her version of philosophical idealism, and so we see another, novel, metaphysical sense of 'Reality' also developed by Sassoon. Again exemplifying this outlook, on 30 March he lodged the following entry:

> Here life is audacious and invincible – until it is whirled away in enigmatic helplessness and ruin; and then it is only the bodies that are smashed and riddled; for the profound and purposeful spirit of renascence moves in and rests on all things – imperceptible between the scarred and swarming earth and the noble solitudes of sky – the spirit that triumphs over visible destruction, as leaping water laughs at winds and rocks and shipwrecked hulks.[37]

These entries often grounded such high minded speculation with a more earthy interest in combat experiences. For example, his diary from this period recorded a fascination with night time operations in no-man's-land: 'To-night I'm going to try and spot one of their working-parties and chuck some bombs at them. Better to get a sling at them in the open – even if on one's belly – than to sit here and have a great thing drop on one's head. I found it most exhilarating – just like starting for a race.'[38] Indeed, entries such as this one convey a cluster of qualities, especially a matter of fact tone, a sense of someone comfortable and at ease with front line experiences, and the impression of war as regeneration, that make them not entirely dissimilar from Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* – another maximal modernist response to the war, as we will see in the next chapter.

On 3 June, Sassoon's diary speculated on the notion of the ghosts of soldiers haunting the battlefields after the war. He hypothesized that his future self would be among these spectral warriors, throwing Mills-bombs and killing Germans, 'slipping back into our trench, and laughing with my men at the fun I've had in no-man's-land'.[39] On the 7 June, he

[36] Ibid. p.37. The reference to Rupert Brooke is in regard to one of his war sonnets, "Safety".
[37] Ibid. p.47.
[38] Ibid. pp.50–1.
[39] Ibid. p.72.

discussed the idea of getting a 'Blighty wound', rejecting such dishonourable desires he continued thus: 'I rather want to see the summer out, and get the experience of the big battle which must surely be coming next month. And, as for dying, I know it's nothing, and there's not much for me but to loose except a few years of ease and futility.' He then went on to explain how enduring a sense of profound suffering had resulted in a paradoxical response: 'What I'm doing and enduring now is the last thing anyone could ask for; I'm being pushed along the rocky path, and the world seems all the sweeter for it. The world seen from exile; I can't see things in proportion tonight.'[40] As we will see, this point hints at a sense of martyrdom that would become more pronounced the following year. Such quotes also convey something of the mental instability that was encroaching into his diary entries as Sassoon's front line experience grew.

In July, Sassoon participated in the opening stages of the Battle of the Somme, where, according to all sources, he continued his overly enthusiastic warrior role until he was returned home in August as a result of what was diagnosed as dysentery and a fever – 'Trench Fever'. While in England, his old friend Robbie Ross introduced Sassoon to the notorious circle of radical pacifists based at Garsington, Oxford, which included Lady Otteline Morrell and Bertrand Russell. Alongside continued news of the horrors of the Somme, extended contact with this group through the rest of the year politicised Sassoon, and he became receptive to their viewpoint, which essentially argued that that British politics had fallen into a decadent state. Through this association, he was soon convinced that the British government was sacrificing swathes of the British youth in an act of political opportunism designed to increase markets for British businesses after the war. Further, acting as Sassoon's literary agent, Ross arranged for the commercial publication of Sassoon's war poems. In December, Sassoon also read Wells' *Mr Britling Sees it Through*, even quoting the Britling character's disillusionment with the war's early days in his diary.

What is interesting about Sassoon's narrative is that, even after this disillusionment with the way in which the war was being conducted, he found that he still possessed many of his 'Happy Warrior' attitudes. Like Wells, Rosenberg and others, Sassoon could not see war only in terms of despair. In his case, this was marked by a disparity between a genuine thrill when presented with the prospect of front line action, and his growing anger at both the military authorities and the attitude of civilians to the war. He still felt a sense of exhilaration

[40] Ibid. p.74.

at the prospect of fighting, but increasingly this was now tainted with a far more melancholic attitude – for example, on 20 January 1917, his diary recorded: 'When I go out again I will be mad as ever. And others will laugh at my secret frenzy. But the loveliness of earth will be a torment and a sweet tumult in my heart.'[41] He also recorded how the theology of Christianity was of no real help at the front, arguing the next day that it 'was all "carry on" and "Get there somehow". They did not "walk the secret way with anger in their brain", or see "love, a great Angel stand Gazing far beyond time", as Abercrombie says so finely'.[42] As with Wells and Sinclair, we can see that the war drew out the need to find a highly idiosyncratic form of spiritual knowledge, one that organised religion could not offer, though of course Sassoon's solution to this problem was unique. In addition to this, Sassoon's characterisation of himself as a modern martyr figure was also becoming stronger. On the 23 January, his diary even recorded that when 'I shut my eyes, seeing in the darkness always the same – in spite of myself – the suffering mortal figure on the cross, but the face is my own'. Further, 'there are hosts of shadowy forms with uplifted arms – souls of men, agonised and aspiring, hungry for what they seek as God in vastness'.[43] Finally, around this time, Sassoon's outlook became more radical. Increasingly conscious of a sacrificial quality to his identity (which by now he saw as allied not with civilian life in England or its political mechanisms, but specifically to the men under his command), his outlook became charged with the idea that front line soldier intellectuals such as himself had, in effect, become a new elite possessing a uniquely attuned ethical perspective on the war. This allowed for a different idea of a sacred duty, a higher sense of mission. The following week, he continued:

> Now the wings of death are over me once more. And while my body cries out that they are a savage threat (cowering as a bird under the hawk's shadow in the sun) something within lifts adoring hands, something is filled with noble passion and desire for that benison and promise of freedom. And all the greatness that was mine last year shall be mine again.[44]

[41] Ibid. p.121–2.
[42] Ibid. p.122.
[43] Ibid. p.124.
[44] Ibid. p.128.

Sassoon's famous protest, made in the summer of 1917, can be seen as another extension of his contrary state of mind and his self-sacrificial complex. The origins of his demonstration lay in his reactions to civilians while on leave in 1917. His first book of poems, *The Old Huntsman*, had been published in May, rendering Sassoon the new darling of the London literary establishment. This also brought him into contact with many prowar opinions, perspectives that often showed no real comprehension of conditions at the front. This lack of understanding of the war fuelled a sense of outrage at the failure of the civilian world to grasp the magnitude of the horrors of the trenches. Sassoon's subsequent action consisted of failing to turn up for duty on 2 July 1917; instead he sent a letter to his commanding officer stating that he would rather face a court marshal than return to active service. In an accompanying statement, he argued that he was making his protest not only against the politicians responsible for 'the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed', but also against 'the callous complacence with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realise'.[45] Before the protest, his actions were encouraged by the radical pacifists at Garsington – especially Bertrand Russell, who, as we have briefly seen in the Introduction, developed his own intellectual confrontation with a decadent modernity during the war – though not Ross, who feared for the poet's future when he heard of Sassoon's decision to release his public statement against the war. Wells, a figure Sassoon much admired, was more congratulatory and thought that the statement may help bring some sanity to the debates regarding the continuance of the war. The long diary entry for 19 June demonstrated how Sassoon conceived his protest as an attempt to break through hegemonic misconceptions regarding the war, arguing at one point that the 'rulers of England have always relied on the ignorance and patient credulity of the crowd. If the crowd could see into the cynical hearts it would lynch its dictators.'[46] However, the result was more cover-up rather than protest – the army and some of Sassoon's concerned friends, especially Robert Graves, worked hard to ensure Sassoon received little publicity. After a hearing at an Army Medical Board, which was probably rigged, Sassoon was diagnosed with 'shell-shock' and transferred to Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh.

[45] Ibid. pp.173–4.
[46] Ibid. p.175.

There is little evidence to suggest that Sassoon was suffering from any psychiatric disorder, and it would also be far too speculative to attempt to make such a diagnosis with hindsight. Here, he met with W. H. R. Rivers, a psychiatrist influenced by Freud who described Sassoon's mentality vaguely as an 'anti-war complex', and who would later encourage his socialism; and Wilfred Owen, who he came to consider a superior poet. After leaving Craiglockhart, Sassoon's return to soldierly life saw him again cultivate the mixture of horror and excitement that had characterised his earlier wartime experiences. For example, whilst stationed in Palestine in February 1918, he recorded the following:

> The beginning of a new adventure. I am already half way into my campaigning dream-life. Funny mixture of reality and crude circumstance with inner "flame-like" spiritual experience. But this time I know myself, and am quite free to study others – equipped to interpret this strangest of adventures – ready to create brilliant pictures of sunlight and shadow. In the "awful brevity" of human life I seek truth.[47]

Again, Sassoon invoked a register of spiritual purpose and self-sacrifice in these diary entries: '...if death happens to meet me on these hills – the ragged old Syrian rascal – who cares? I'll go along with him to the Prophet's Paradise, or a dusty old tomb where he's got my number up.'[48] And following his transfer to France: 'It is all like a pilgrimage – leading me deathwards. Everything seems to fit in. I am working up to another climax – steadily. The nearer I get to the war the more I desire to share its terrors again – that I may learn yet more the meaning of it – and the effect.'[49] Through his idiosyncratic perspective, war could hold a unique spiritual experience. Also, like Rosenberg, this was a present centred worldview, a redeemed world after the war featured little in these entries.

After returning from the front in August 1918 on extended leave, Sassoon both courted, and was courted by, the radical left. Indeed, his wartime protest and particularly his poetry had given him a minor celebrity persona, especially within pacifist and literary circles. By this point, Sassoon was deeply influenced by the visions of hope emerging from the crisis of the war that had been presented by Henri Barbusse and H. G. Wells, and was also hopeful

[47] Ibid., p.213.
[48] Ibid., p.224.
[49] Ibid., p.242.

of Wilson's vision for nations to form a new, harmonious international order. His newfound socialist principles did not sit well with his continued attendance of upper class dinner parties, such as the one he attended with Eddie Marsh in Chelsea on the evening of Armistice Day. Basically, he liked to play the radical cat among the upper class pigeons in the immediate postwar years; however, more sustained, meaningful left-wing action was less forthcoming. Nevertheless, the war had briefly radicalised Sassoon, and he genuinely felt that an epoch had passed away as a result of the conflagration.

Like many others, such as Orage and Wells, Sassoon also viewed the years immediately following the war as a time that failed to live up to hopes for renovation after the calamity. For example, in his autobiography he described 1919 as 'a year of rootless re-beginnings', marred by 'steadily developing disillusionments'.[50] Briefly, he served as the literary editor of the *Daily Herald* from March, though he left the paper by the end of the year. Sassoon's successes in this position were decidedly mixed, and his written contributions lacked a sense of authenticity regarding their left-wing convictions. Consequently, the position helped reveal to him a lack of depth in his political principles. This was a fact most starkly exposed by his contribution to *Clarté*, Barbusse's short-lived society for radical European intellectuals. Briefly, Sassoon was the secretary for the society's British branch, although at a meeting at the House of Commons in late 1919 he failed to rise to the occasion. Speeches by Wells and Shaw were passionate performances, yet Sassoon, representing the 'younger generation', merely mumbled something regarding the need for people to read Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts*.[51] Sassoon's admixture of upper class conformity and radicalism can also be seen in the fact that he gained membership of both the Reform Club, an epitome of the British establishment, and the radical 1917 Club, set up in the wake of the Russian Revolution. What we can take from this very partial embrace of left-wing political modernism by Sassoon is the notion that the war certainly radicalised the poet, instilling the identity of the rebel in him. However, he failed spectacularly to become a significant dissenting voice, speaking truth to power as he had during the war, from a position within the British establishment in the postwar years. Perhaps his sense of rootlessness and alienation from social conventions during the war was not profound

[50] Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey*, p.160.
[51] Ibid., p.169.

enough for him to reject bourgeois reality once he was again presented with the opportunity to relax into its comforting embrace.

Whatever the explanation, without being at the heart of the crisis of the war, Britain's 'organic intellectual' *par excellence* during the conflagration ossified into a more conservative figure after the crisis had passed. This again suggests caution in associating Sassoon too closely with modernism. Nevertheless, he can be seen to operate on the fringes of the maximal modernist model, as the discussion of his poetry below will demonstrate further. Therefore, when radicalised during the war, we can identify Sassoon as a fringe maximal modernist. This view is relevant both for analysing Sassoon's poetic work from this time in itself, and in order to contextualise his wartime viewpoint – which specifically accentuated how political corruption sustained the war – within a wider range of European dissident intellectuals. However after the war this radical confrontation with modernity's decadent seeming aspects was replaced with a comfortable upper-middle class lifestyle and a distinct lack of controversial poetry; therefore, his maximal modernist qualities were, at best, sporadic.

Before concluding this discussion, then, it is worth briefly examining Sassoon's war poetry itself. As with his initial diary entries, early examples of Sassoon's wartime verse chime strongly with the notion that war had allowed the poet to find a more intense, spiritual sense of reality, a change that he clearly welcomed. Also, this poetry was not articulated in an aesthetically modernist fashion. For example, "Absolution" argues that the horrors of war pardon the sins of the world, allowing 'beauty to shine in all that we can see'; therefore soldiers are 'a happy legion', and concludes that, through their acceptance of sacrifice, soldiers have won a 'heritage of heart' that offers them all they could want for in life.[52] Similarly, "To My Brother" presents the communion of soldiers positively as a sacred bond; and "To Victory" concludes with a lyrical description of an imagined future, a better world after the war 'when my sight shall be clear and my heart rejoice; / Come from the sea with a breadth of approaching brightness, / When the blithe wind laughs on the hills with uplifted voice'.[53] The poem "A Mystic as Soldier" describes the special type of spiritual experience that trench warfare offered, as the second verse demonstrates: 'Now God is in the strife, /

[52] Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems* (London, Faber and Faber, 2002) p.10.
[53] Ibid.

And I must seek Him there, / Where death outnumbers life, / And fury smites the air'.[54] Initial poetic responses, then, elide suffering with access to renewed senses of the numinous.

We can see an early transition from spiritual concerns articulated through an abstract and lofty language to his much celebrated realism in "The Redeemer". With a description of the trenches as its backcloth, the narrator of this poem describes his modern vision of the suffering of Christ: 'No thorny crown, only a woollen cap / He wore – an English soldier'. The narrator continues his description of a modernised Jesus thus: 'to the end, unjudging, he'll endure / Horror and pain, not uncontent to die'.[55] The trope of the suffering of the soldier leading to spiritual salvation, then, was still strong in his poetry. However its tone had fundamentally changed; we are now definitely in the trenches, not the idealised realms of the mind. Unsurprisingly having read his diaries, then, what remains present throughout his wartime poetry is a sense of war as a sacred experience. Therefore, "Secret Music", probably composed in December 1916,[56] when Sassoon was becoming disillusioned with the war, still speaks of the mystical reality it induced, concluding thus:

> To the world's end I went, and found
> Death in his carnival glare;
> But in my torment I was crowned
> And music dawned above despair.[57]

Another example can be found in the 1918 volume *Counter-Attack*, which opens with "Prelude: The Troops". This poem evokes a picture of troops fighting and struggling through the horrors of war, after death they travel to 'some mooned Valhalla', leaving behind them a world deprived of youth.[58] Even after he had become disillusioned with the nation's cause, soldiers were still given a special place in heaven by Sassoon.

What diminished, however, was the sense of naïvety regarding the war as a patriotic endeavour, a quality that marks early poems such as "Absolution". Further, through exposure to the front line, Sassoon soon develops his satirical voice. The poem "In the

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[54] Ibid., p.12.
[55] Ibid., p.13.
[56] Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet, A Biography (1886 – 1918)* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1999) p.314.
[57] Sassoon, *Collected Poems*, p.29.
[58] Ibid., p.61.

Pink", composed in February 1916, for example, is his first successful war satire.[59] We should see Sassoon's many wartime satires as a sustained attempt to challenge popular consciousness. Their scope is not limited to explaining, to an audience that he regarded as largely decadent, what comprises the reality of the trenches; rather, their compass extends to a more general attack on Sassoon's reading of the ethical perspective of the majority within British society during the war. Indeed, in their historical context Sassoon's poems were a serious effort to change variegated complacent opinions regarding warfare, including the acceptance of received ethical values concerning the nature of heroism in warfare, especially those derived from Greek notions of the heroic epitomised by *The Illiad*; and the legitimacy of power structures manifest in the state, the press, the army and even the church. Whatever their lasting literary merit, in terms of cultural history, Sassoon's satires were important poetic expressions, fusing art with ideology, that contained the power to subvert people's thinking regarding the war. Through this satirical verse, then, Sassoon demonstrated himself a successful 'organic intellectual'; indeed, it is this sense of confrontation where we can identify a maximal modernist quality in Sassoon. In poetic terms too, these satires were innovative. "In The Pink" rejects his earlier, more lyrical style and replaces this diction with a colloquial tone, thereby adding greater verisimilitude to Willie Davis' plight. Similarly, another key poem from this period, "A Working Party", authentically describes how a 'decent' yet shy 'young man with a meagre wife / And two small children in a Midland town' carefully made his way through the trenches at night, only to be senselessly shot dead in the final lines.[60]

Because Sassoon's satirical poems appear to sublimate a sense of anger at the continuance of the war into verse, Adrian Caesar argues that it is essential for us to recognise 'the problematic position in which these poems place their audience. Implicitly the front line soldier is assumed to be in a morally superior position to any civilians.' Further, far 'from being pacifist in implications', for Caesar many of Sassoon's verses are actually 'bellicose in so far as they imply that participation in battle is a prerequisite to forming a moral attitude to that activity'.[61] However, rather than seeing Sassoon's poetry as 'bellicose', using the

[59] Indeed, continental parallels of a war poet using satire to engage with the conflagration can be drawn with the work of Alfred Lichtenstein in Germany. For an analysis of Alfred Lichtenstein, see: Bridgewater, *The German Poets of the First World War*, ch.4.
[60] Sassoon, *Collected Poems*, p.17.
[61] Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man*, p.80.

methodological tools of this study, we can better describe this problem by characterising Sassoon's poems as vehicles for Sassoon's own radical confrontation with a modernity that he regarded as decadent. They can be seen as possessing a poetic message that, in effect, attempted to radically remould the received opinions of their readership, an outcome achieved through jarring descriptions often designed to raise questions regarding the morality of modern warfare. Further, many of these poems were designed to initially generate a discordant response in the mind of their reader, thereby unsettling complacent values and opinions of the then dominant ideal of the soldier as hero (as epitomised by Rupert Brooke), until this violence to received opinions became readjusted to the horrors that the alleged combination of modern technology and corrupt political power could inflict upon the construction of the warrior as hero. Through this lens, we can see that Sassoon's role as a front line soldier poet manifested a powerful avant-garde quality. Indeed, for figures such as Wilfred Owen he represented an ethically superior advance force.[62] This avant-garde pose appeared radical both in the eyes of figures of authority and more generally in the eyes of civilians who were often not interested in the realities faced daily by front line soldiers. As we have seen, by 1917 Sassoon regarded the government as a 'dictatorship' and British civilians as characterised by 'ignorance' and 'patient credulity'. It is worth exploring this extension of Caesar's point through a number of Sassoon's war satires, where the early idealism had evaporated, and the angry, 'organic intellectual' came to the fore.

Beginning with satires from *The Old Huntsman*, we can see many examples of Sassoon's critical attitude towards a perceived moral decadence among Britain's civilian population. For example, the eponymous character in the "Tombstone Maker" condemns the war because bodies were being buried abroad, which was bad for his business; "'They'" depicts a Bishop who cannot explain the war, yet is happy to send troops off to their deaths at the front in the name of God; and "'Blighters'" depicts the violence of the battlefield, symbolised by the epitome of the new warfare, the tank, sweeping away decadence at home. '[T]here'd be no more jokes in Music-halls / To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume', the poem concludes as the tank, a synecdoche of modernity's destructive power, rolls down

[62] Indeed, before the war Owen too was steeped in the sense of decadence underpinning the thinking of many aesthetically sensitive figures. His thinking was especially indebted to British Romanticism and the more recent trends of French Symbolism. Also, like Sassoon, he was no pacifist figure, and sought to capture the paradox of the heroism of the individual soldier juxtaposed with the deeply unheroic nature of warfare under the novel conditions of modernity. For more on Owen's life and aesthetic development, see: Dominic Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography* (London: Phoenix, 2003).

the streets of England.[63] However, many of the satirical pieces in his second volume, *Counter-Attack*, talk most clearly to this point. "How To Die" mocks the idea that soldiers passed away as good Christians; in reality, despite civilian preconceptions, soldiers did not always repress their emotions, did not refrain from sobbing and weeping, and did not pay 'due regard for decent taste' when they died.[64] "The Effect" contrasts the words of a war correspondent – 'The effect of our bombardment was terrific. One man told me he had never seen so many dead before' – with the reality of the front. Following a description of the last moments of a soldier called Dick, Sassoon offers an ironic refrain that reveals to the reader how he believed the mentality of modern commerce regarded the mass production and commercial aspect of death in wartime; the narrator concludes: *'How many dead? As many as you wish / Don't count 'em; they're too many / Who'll buy my nice fresh corpses, two a penny?*'[65] War reporters and businessmen, then, are decadent and corrupt in comparison to the morally superior, yet unheroic, soldier figure. "The Fathers" portrays the decadence of the older generation, depicting two clubbable gentlemen who talk vicariously of their sons' exploits in the field. The final lines see these 'impotent old friends' 'toddling through the door', another image not only of decline but of the corruption of established power and its moral betrayal of youth.[66] "Base Details" similarly describes corrupt power 'toddling' away to safety, this time it was the 'scarlet Majors at the Base', the target being, of course, the upper echelons of the army;[67] "The General" is likewise critical of military power. "Editorial Impressions" is another of these satires commenting on the powers of the press – thereby demonstrating sensitivity to the powers of the mass media.

We can also see Sassoon's sense of soldiers as a modern elite in his portrayal of women in his poetry. Perhaps the starkest of these portrayals is "Glory of Women". Sassoon mocks the way women see soldiers through a heroic lens: 'you believe / That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace'. He continues by lamenting the fact that women produce the shells that sustain the horrors that they appeared to delight in, and the poem concludes with the image of a German mother dreaming of her son's heroics while knitting him socks; in

[63] Sassoon, *Collected Poems*, p.21.
[64] Ibid., p.66.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., p.68
[67] Ibid.

reality the face of his now dead body 'is trodden deeper in mud'.[68] Similarly, "Their Frailty" depicts a wife who delights in receiving news of her husband's return due to a 'Blighty wound'; she accepts the continuance of war, and therefore the death of thousands of men, just 'So long as He's all right'.[69] As Caesar points out, for Sassoon the only people who could form a legitimate moral response to the war, as articulated through these poems, are front line soldiers. Sassoon came to see himself as part of a new, ethically superior elite and regarded himself as the counterpoint to endemic moral decadence in Britain. During the war, his poetry was a vanguard form of artistic expression that sought to destroy received values and highlight the moral antinomies that were being revealed by the war.

It is also worth looking at some of the poems that spoke more positively regarding the morality of the soldier. For example "Banishment", written whilst at Craiglockhart, describes Sassoon's intense desire to continue fighting as long as the war endured. 'By grappling guns', the poem argues, 'Love drove me to rebel', yet 'Love drives me back to grope with them through hell'. This need to return to the trenches contains a powerful redemptive quality, Sassoon concludes, 'And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven'.[70] For Sassoon, then, the company of soldiers becomes the saving grace of the horrors of war experience; a paradox also reflected in "The Dream". The poem "Fight to a Finish" extends the logic of the front line soldier as a new, ethically superior elite, and describes the superiority of judgement of returning soldiers. Rather than merely taking part in the victory parade, where 'Bands played and flags were flying', and the 'music of returning feet' is being lapped up by 'Yellow Pressmen' – all of which implying that the soldiers' glory was passed directly onto the political leaders – the soldiers rebel: 'Snapping their bayonets on to charge the mob, / Grim Fusiliers broke ranks with glint of steel, / at last the boys had found a cushy job'. They attack the journalists, before the poem's protagonist 'with my trusty bombers turned and went / To clear those Junkers out of Parliament'.[71] This poem is important as it depicts explicitly what many of his satires implied: the ethical standards of society outside of the front line troops needed to be revolutionised, through violence if necessary. This was the culturally revolutionary core of Sassoon's message. Confronting a modernity perceived as decadence, his verses were an attempt to radically renew the ethical

[68] Ibid., p.72.
[69] Ibid., p.73.
[70] Ibid., p.79.
[71] Ibid., p.70.

framework of a society that had fundamentally changed due to the new dynamics of power manifest by the shifting interrelationships between technology, capital, politics, media and mass society.

Finally, the poetry Sassoon wrote at the war's close, and published after the war in the volume *Picture Show*, reflects both Sassoon's desire for change, alongside his failure to maintain the radical quality that gave his first two commercial volumes their profound impact. To give some examples: "Memorial Tablet" suggests inequities within the class system, but, as we have seen, Sassoon can hardly be described as a committed member of the proletariat after the war; "Aftermath" is more powerful, and instructs people to remember the horrors of the war, to retain in their memories an understanding of the grizzly world that characterised it and not to forget the crisis when living in the uneventful monotony of peacetime; and finally, regarding social revolution, the book concludes with "Everyone Sang", a poem with a genuine palingenetic energy. The 'singing' the poem talks of is the spontaneous outbreak of socialist revolution. It concludes lyrically with the following idea: 'O, but Everyone / Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done'.[72]

As with Rosenberg, then, we can see that aspects of Sassoon's wartime poetry and biography chime with the maximal modernist ideal type. Of course, we can also see clear deviations from this paradigm. Both the prewar and postwar Sassoon reveals a figure whose identity is more clearly bourgeois and integrated within the British establishment. Also, we do not see a sustained attempt after the war within his poetry or his political activities to engage with a sense of modernity decadence, as we can see in Wells and the guild socialists; nor did he really attempt to develop aesthetically modernist qualities within his poetry. This again suggests caution in identifying Sassoon un-problematically with the maximal modernist model. Therefore, like Rosenberg, he should be seen as an intellectual operating on the fringes of what this study is calling maximal modernism. Turning now to our final case study, here we find a figure that should be concieved as a poet operating just outside the maximal modernist mindset.

[72] Ibid., p.114.

Rupert Brooke

Out of all the war poets, perhaps Rupert Brooke has been regarded as the figure that was most evocative of a sense of 'Englishness'. Further, of all the cases studies examined in this thesis, Brooke was probably the least likely to be considered a modernist in any normal sense of the term. He has been included here because he is often cited by historians as the key figure in Britain that argued the war was a form of youthful regeneration and escape from a dull, bourgeois modernity, a reading that the following analysis will not try to challenge. Nevertheless, although he saw the war as regeneration, his work cannot be described as modernist in terms of experimentation or satire; rather, the sonnets that made him famous during the war became deeply patriotic, mass produced cultural products. In terms of his lasting legacy, patriotism has remained a central factor and so poems such as "The Old Vicarage, Granchester" and especially "The Soldier" have come to hold a unique place in the unofficial patriotic canon. Indeed, the Rupert Brooke myth that developed after his death created an idealised version of his back story. Evoking an idealised patriotic figure, the Brooke myth has edited out his ambivalent sexuality, the controlling and cruel aspects of his personality, his nervous breakdown, and his puritanical views, focusing on his youthful good looks, his ostensible brilliance as a poet and an emerging intellectual, his easy going bohemianism, and his magnetic charisma.

As this case study will demonstrate, during the war not only did his war poetry evoke for many in Britain a sense of youthful revolt, resurgent nationalism and moral purpose, but also his death was widely considered to symbolise the sacrifice of the nation's youth at war throughout the conflagration, legitimising further sacrifices. Indeed, he was the epitome of a pattern that Bowra identifies occurring across Europe in 1914: for poets to greet the war as an apocalyptic event offering a naïve form of spiritual renewal. In terms of maximal modernism, it will be argued that Brooke should be conceived as a poet who did not become such a figure in his lifetime, although his work did identify with a more general sense of modernity as decadence. However, despite his critique of modernity, we will see that Brooke failed to become a genuine radical, and in the years before the war he became an increasingly conservative figure. As a result of this lack of confrontational verve, we cannot identify Brooke as even a fringe maximal modernist. His role in the context of this study, then, is that he articulated a wider zeitgeist among Britain's youth which regarded the war as a form of escape and youthful revolt.

Looking at his prewar years we see that, even more so than Sassoon, Brooke was socialised into the English establishment. His education began at one of the key institutions of the English public school system, Rugby School. Brooke was the son of one of its teachers, William Parker Brooke, a figure dominated at home by his puritanical and forceful wife, Ruth; she dominated Brooke too. At school, Brooke tried to conform to the stereotype of the English schoolboy. Under the influence of a family friend, a lawyer and minor decadent poet St John Lucas, Brooke was first encouraged to write poetry, and was introduced to Baudelaire, Dowson, Swinburne and especially Oscar Wilde. The aesthetic ideals of *De Profundis* in particular were central to Brooke's early poses as a world weary aesthete. Poems from his juvenilia, such as "Lost Lilies" from 1905, serve as examples of Brooke's thinking on the idea of an idealised and unobtainable love. The eponymous lilies in the poem represent the death of a first, and therefore perfect, love. Despite attempts to experience such passion elsewhere, nothing is comparable to 'the perfect beauty .../ The immortal pallor of my lost lilies'.[73]

Brooke passed easily from Rugby to King's College Cambridge, and he soon secured himself positions in key institutions at the university. Firstly, he joined the elite Apostles, a society predicated not only on intellectual prowess but also on homosexuality. This brought him into contact with figures such as John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey and G. E. Moore, alongside several of his university tutors. In his first year, Brooke also helped to form the Carbonari, a political reading group influenced by the Italian movement of the same name, alongside the poetry of Swinburne. Further, Brooke joined the Cambridge Fabians, and even became President of the university's branch of the society. Under his stewardship, the organisation mutated from a handful of enthusiasts into the university's largest political society. This circle also brought him into contact with a number of female students based at Newnham College, and Brooke maintained a tortuous on and off relationship for several years with the treasurer of the society Katherine (Ka) Cox. He also met the Olivier sisters, Brynhild, Margery, Daphne and Noel, the latter of whom was a subsequent victim of Brooke's seductive powers. Indeed, it is worth highlighting that Brooke, who appears to have been neither exclusively homo- or hetero- sexual, spent much of his life oscillating between social groups where bisexuality was frowned upon. As Adrian Caesar has noted,

[73] Rupert Brooke, *The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) p.172.

such a sexual identity might potentially have led to a resolution of the emotional turmoil that helped to fuel many of his cruel and negative qualities towards potential or actual lovers.[74]

Fabianism also brought Brooke into contact with some of his intellectual heroes, especially Hilaire Belloc and Wells. Demonstrating his developing political voice, Brooke ended his stint as President of the University's Fabian society with a lecture called "Democracy and the Arts". Here, he outlined a vision of a new era of state funding for cultural production, not by a single monolithic body, but through various auspices, including universities, art colleges, and county councils. Art, he continued, needed to respond to the conditions of the present. Further, it was a mode of self expression, not the voice of the community, and so it must act as a bridge between the mutable world and timelessness: 'In the transience and hurry Art opens out every way on to the Eternal Ends'. Responding to modernity – in the lecture epitomised by mass literacy and a mass democracy – was also of especial importance to the future of art: 'This change in the old conditions, this breaking up of unity, this multitude of opening minds', he argued, 'may bring perplexity and apparent confusion of standards', though, paradoxically, this fundamental change would also create 'the chance of vast, unimaginable, unceasing additions to the glory of the literature of England'. His conclusions highlighted that, though he was a proponent of state funding, he also expressly opposed any form of official art; he wanted avant-garde ideas to thrive, and for artists to search for new idols not old ones, even if they were working only a generation or so ago.[75]

Brooke was not merely interested in politics at this time. He was also a leading figure in a circle of intellectuals drawn from the Young Fabians that indulged in camping trips, nude bathing and a return to a more basic way of life, framed as an antidote to Edwardian modernity. The Neo-Pagans, as Virginia Woolf dubbed them,[76] were inspired by the utopianism of Morris, Wells, and Carpenter, alongside the modernising pedagogical ideals of Bedales School. Indeed, several members, including Ka Cox and the Olivier sisters were

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[74] Brooke's various love affairs have been well rehearsed elsewhere, and I see no need to go into details regarding this issue here. Nigel Jones's biography offers the most comprehensive overview of Brooke's private life, see: Nigel Jones, *Rupert Brooke: Life, Death and Myth* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999); whereas Adrian Caesar gives the most sophisticated account of Brooke's nebulous sexual identity, see: Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man*, ch.2.

[75] 'Democracy and the Arts' in Rupert Brooke, *The Prose of Rupert Brooke* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1956) pp.67–82.

[76] The term dated from at least the 1880s when it was used to categorise members of the Pre-Raphaelites See: Paul Delaney, *The Neo-Pagans: Friendship and Love in the Rupert Brooke Circle* (London: MacMillan Ltd., 1987) p.122.

alumni from Bedales. In his poem "Second Best", Brooke described the Neo-Pagans' nebulous hope for renewal, their quest to escape from reality, their projection of the myth of rebirth onto an earthly construction of Eden, and their idealisation of a childlike comportment. He concluded with the lines:

> Exile of immortality, strongly wise,
> Strain through the dark with undesirous eyes,
> To what may lie beyond it. Set your star,
> O heart for ever! Yet, behind the night,
> Waits for the great unborn, somewhere afar,
> Some white tremendous daybreak. And the light,
> Returning, shall give back the golden hours,
> Oceans a windless level, Earth a lawn
> Spacious and full of sunlit dancing-places,
> And laughter, and music, and, among the flowers,
> The gay child-hearts of men, and their child-faces,
> O heart, in the great dawn![77]

However, the ideals of Neo-Paganism were also riddled with contradictions. For example, as Paul Delaney has pointed out, the combination between a cult of the naked body (itself a reflection of the wider attempt to escape the puritanical attitude towards the body inculcated by the Victorians), a lack of reverence for social convention, and generational revolt, did not square with the self-imposed policy of pre-marital chastity, allowing many emotional confusions and frustrations to remain unresolved.[78] Further, steeped in the nascent field of anthropology, Francis Cornford even proposed designing a ritual for the group. This only served to highlight that, despite the Neo-Pagans' attempt to embrace the irrational, the group remained too self-conscious to take such a development seriously.[79] Nevertheless, the movement should be seen as a constituent part of a much wider trend among the European youth groups of the prewar period to leave the fold of established religion and to develop a

[77] Brooke, *The Poetical Works*, p.144.
[78] Delaney, *The Neo-Pagans*, p.68.
[79] Ibid. pp.101–2

new set of pagan ideals, epitomised by the *Wandervögel* movement in Germany. As Brooke phrased this attitude when writing to Jacques Raverat:

> We'll show the grey unbelieving age, we'll teach the whole damn World, that there's a better Heaven than the pale serene Anglican windless harmonium-buzzing Eternity of the Christians, a Heaven in Time, now and forever, ending for each, staying for all, a Heaven of Laughter and Bodies and Flowers and Love and People and Sun and Wind, in the only place we know or care for, ON EARTH.[80]

We can see a key tension in Brooke's prewar years here. On the one hand, Brooke did try to pose as a more rebellious figure, yet on the other, like Sassoon, he was too well socialised into the British establishment to truly see beyond its boundaries. He could not escape his upper-middle class upbringing and the moderate tenor that a life of privilege offered.

Despite his desire to connect with a more elemental existence, when Brooke visited Munich in 1911, this cultural conservatism betrayed him again. He dismissed the new waves of Expressionism – i.e. Kandinsky, Klee, Mack, and Marc – and was generally underwhelmed by the Bacchus-Fest that erupted during the February of his stay. Finding himself in Germany again the following year – and again surrounded by bohemians, socialists, intellectuals, artists and *Natur-menschen* – in a café he wrote one of his most famous poems, a lyrical hymn to an idyllic, rural England "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester". Brooke's parochialism, then, outshone any avant-garde tendencies, especially after the Neo-pagan movement fizzled out after 1911. In these experiences, we can see why we should not regard Brooke as even a fringe maximal modernist. When confronted with modernists and cultural experimentation, he reverted to a calm and safe poetic evocation of a rural, English idyll. This poem was highly successful, but can hardly be regarded as aesthetic modernism.

By the time he reached adulthood, Brooke had been entwined in the cultural dynamics and tensions that influenced many confrontations with a decadent-seeming modernity, but was far from a clear cut case of a maximal modernist intellectual. Further, his conservative and puritanical aspects grew stronger with age. After a breakdown in 1912, Brooke loosened his connections with many of his older friends, such as Ka Cox, James Strachey and Noel Oliver. With the Neo-Pagan circle broken, Brooke's next attempt to re-

[80] Rupert Brooke, *The Letters of Rupert Brooke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) p.195.

establish a sense of vitality through his chosen field of poetry, Georgian Poetry, would be discredited after the war as a conservative rather than radical movement. Nevertheless, as C. K. Stead has pointed out, this is to misread the importance of the movement's reforming qualities; the Georgians were important precursors, not direct rivals, to the more elemental developments in modern verse that were created by modernists such as Eliot and Pound.[81] When viewed within the context of a deeply conservative aesthetic environment, especially true of the English poetry milieu of the time, the Georgians were certainly innovators, though not aesthetic modernists. What was most remarkable about the Georgians was their popularity, for example selling 13,000 copies of its first volume; clearly, their aesthetic was a very marketable commodity. Again, this commercial success strongly suggests caution in identifying Brooke with a genuinely radical confrontation with modernity.

In the early spring of 1913, Brooke became a Fellow at King's College, Cambridge. Before taking up this post, he decided to set out on a trip to America and the pacific; a journey that allowed him to find another means of escape, this time on the island of Tahiti. Here, Brooke partook in a love affair with a native woman, Taatamata, and wrote some of his best poetry. On his return, however, Brooke still found a society that drew out in him the sense of *Weltschmerz* that had plagued his adult life to date. In a piece of ostensible worldly advice, though nothing more than a generalised whinge on the state of affairs that greeted him on his return, Brooke wrote to Frances Cornford's daughter Helena, then merely 6 month old, of a future England that awaited him. Here, he speculated that 'another Jew has bought a peerage' and 'the ways are full of lean & vicious people, dirty, hermaphrodites and eunuchs, Stracheys, moral vagabonds, pitiable scum'. Unlike many of his friends, Brooke continued that he would have an escape from this dreary reality through the power of the mind: he would always be able to recall his time in Tahiti, a world cleansed of the tropes of decadence that he identified in English life. This letter is worth continuing to cite at some length because it gives us access to a host of traits and prejudices characterising Brooke immediately before the war:

> Helena, do not go beyond civilisation. It is unsettling. Inside civilisation one can realise the beastliness of it, and labour – if one's honest, as I hope you'll be – to smash it. But when you get *outside*, you realize the advantages of not being in it *too*

[81] C. K. Stead, *The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot* (London: Continuum, 2005) p.67.

> acutely. My dear, to return to England, where the presence of people I love obscures bloodiness of the state of affairs, I have to cross – how can I say it? – America. Land of Individualism, of Plutocracy, of ugliness. Shall I ever bear to do it? Helena, I have been in America, & have been in New Zealand (a much better place), and I know what England's coming to. They are countries ruled by women. And I shall live to see the total prohibition of alcohol in England, which is the female idea of politics, and the establishment of Christian Science as a State Church, which is the female idea of religion. Helena, do not, even as you grow even older, become a feminist: become, I pray you, a woman.[82]

Expressed in this letter, then, are the following: a classic example of his deep seated misogynistic tendencies; a typical articulation of his anti-Semitism (of course, a prejudice not unusual within the high society of the period but also a trope of alleged decadence); his brazen rejection of a previously valued friendship, James Strachey; his obsession with a binary between dirt and cleanliness; his dislike of materialism and capitalism; and most importantly from our perspective his hope for a sense of escape and transcendence into a world above and beyond the 'dirty' arena of modern Britain. Despite his lack of radical, maximal modernist qualities, then, Brooke did also hold a deep loathing for many aspects of bourgeois modernity.

With the outbreak of war, Brooke was able to transform himself into a warrior-poet, providing him with yet another form of escape from the antinomies of his private life and of the modernity that he had repeatedly rejected. In August, writing about himself in the third person in the *New Statesman*, Brooke claimed that he was becoming dimly aware of a profound change overtaking the world, and that he 'was immensely surprised to perceive that the actual earth of England held for him a quality which ... if he had been sentimental enough to use the word, he'd have called "holiness"', and asserted that 'if Armageddon's on, I suppose one should be there'.[83] We can deduce from his letters during this period that, like the Michael character in Sinclair's *The Tree of Heaven*, war fever was not necessarily an immediate reaction, rather a steady process of conversion to the necessity to fight, unfolding in stages. For example, he initially considered becoming a war correspondent before

[82] Brooke, *The Letters of Rupert Brooke*, pp.573–4.
[83] Brooke, *The Prose of Rupert Brooke*, pp.195–200.

attempting to enlist. Writing to Lady Eileen Wellesley, an intimate friend, on 15 August, he discussed resolving these confused responses to the war:

> I find myself in two natures ... Half my heart is of England, the rest is looking for a home I haven't yet found. So, when this war broke, there was part of my nature and desires that said "Let me alone. What's all this bother? I want to work. I've got ends I desire to reach. If I'd wanted to be a soldier I should have been one. But I've found myself other dreams." It was that part, I suppose, which, when tumult & unrest in me became too strong, sent me seeking a correspondentship. At least it was some individualist part in me which said "It's the biggest thing in your seventy years. You'd better see as much of it as you can. Go, for some paper, immediately." Base thoughts those: when people are offering their lives for their country, not their curiosity ... I had a resentment – or at least the individualist part in me had – against becoming part of a mere machine.[84]

Brooke concluded that he hoped to be at the front soon – as he did in other correspondences. By the end of September, Eddie Marsh had pulled some strings and secured Brooke a position in the army.

Brooke arrived in Belgium on 4 October 1914. Here, any lingering ambivalence he had over fighting for his country evaporated. In a letter to his friend Leonard Bacon, Brooke described his encounter with scenes of the destruction of Antwerp and the exodus of Belgian refugees with a genuine sense of awe:

> the whole heaven and earth was lit up by the glare from the great lakes and rivers of burning petrol, hills and spires of flame. That was like Hell, a Dantesque Hell, terrible. But there – and later – I saw what was a truer Hell. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, their goods on barrows and hand carts and perambulators and wagons, moving into the night ... That is Belgium now: the country where three civilians have been killed to every one soldier ... It is queer to think one has been a witness to one of the greatest crimes of history.

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[84] Brooke, *The Letters of Rupert Brooke*, p.608.

As with Sinclair, the moral outrage provoked by first hand experiences of Belgian refugees fleeing the German invasion unquestionably justified the dangers of combat, and also, as with Sassoon, front line experiences sparked a personal sense of renewal and excitement. 'It's a great life, fighting, while it lasts', he concluded, 'The eye grows clearer and the heart. But it's a bloody thing, half the youth of Europe blown through pain to nothingness, in the incessant mechanical slaughter of these modern battles.'[85] Indeed, this tone of thrill and excitement was typical of many of his wartime letters. In its full magnitude, the war was 'all a terrible thing', one letter stated, though 'in its details, it's great fun. And – apart from the tragedy – I've never felt happier or better in my life than those days in Belgium.' Specifically, the Belgium experiences were formative of a resolution in his new pose as a warrior-poet: 'now I've the feeling of anger at a seen wrong – Belgium – to make me happier and more resolved in my work'.[86]

Some of his hyperbolic letter writing articulated very clearly how the war was acting as a catalyst for a personal sense of rebirth. To John Drinkwater he wrote: 'on service one has a great feeling of fellowship, and a fine thrill, like nothing else in the world. And I'd not be able to exist, for torment, if I weren't doing it. Not a bad place and time to die, Belgium, 1915.' As we will see again in his poetry, death too was a trivial matter:

> The world'll be tame enough after the war, for those who see it. I had hopes that England'ld get on her legs again, achieve youth and merriment, and slough the things I loath – capitalism and feminism and hermaphroditism and the rest. But on maturer consideration, pursued over the muddy miles of Dorset, I think there'll not be much change. What there is for the better, though. Certain sleepers have awoken at heart ... Come die it'll be great fun. And there's great health in the preparation.[87]

What is important to realise here is not merely the obvious articulations of tropes of renewal through military service when reading these letters. Rather, the tone of youthful excitement demonstrates that, in war, Brooke had once again found an arena in which he could escape

[85] Ibid. p.632–3.
[86] Ibid. p.645.
[87] Ibid. p.654–5.

from conformity, releasing him from the mundane, bourgeois existence that he most feared. Just when he was going to have to take up his position as an academic at Kings College, he suddenly found himself fighting in a seemingly apocalyptic war. It was this contrast, escape from adult responsibility and into an idealised, heroic endeavour, which revitalised him. As with Neo-Paganism, by becoming a soldier he could once again live an aesthetic existence. War was appealing as if offered an escape from the decadent modernity that he so loathed.

By the end of February 1915, Brooke found himself sailing to the Mediterranean as part of the Gallipoli campaign. This mission only accentuated his excitement at going to war. As he put this point to his old friend Dudley Ward, 'It's too wonderful. We're going in four days. And the best expedition of the war. Figure me celebrating the first Holy Mass in St Sophia since 1453'.[88] The date is significant not only because the fall of Constantinople is often used to evoke the apocalypse, but also because to Brooke it symbolised both the sense of an ending as well as a vision of historical renovation. A few days later he wrote to the Prime Minister's daughter, Violet Asquith, the following: 'shall we be at a turning point in History? Oh, God!', and continued: 'I've never been quite so happy in my life, I think. Not quite so *pervasively* happy; like a stream flowing entirely to one end. I suddenly realize that the ambition of my life has been – since I was two – to go on a military expedition against Constantinople'.[89] What is interesting in these letters, and this point can be read in more detail in Nigel Jones' discussion of these last months,[90] is the way Brooke consciously framed his involvement in the Gallipoli campaign as a part of a much larger, epic unfolding of the historical process. The war for Brooke was one of a series of historical moments of opportunity, tuning points in the grand narrative of the human story, and he was a key player in this period of liminality and fundamental transition. The historical and the poetic imaginations, then, were fused together, and so through the lens of our ideal type we can even suggest that he read the war as a maximal modernist style event because, for him, it combined a sense of fundamental rupture from a decadent modernity with a poetic vision of a radically reborn future. From this idealised conception of the past, it is clear that Brooke was projecting a vision of renewal of both self and society onto the agency of war. 'This is

[88] Ibid. p.660.
[89] Ibid. p.663.
[90] See: Jones, *Rupert Brooke*, chs.25 and 26.

probably the first letter you have got from a Crusader', he told his friend Jacques Raverat, and continued his identification with the Crusades thus:

> the early Crusaders were very jolly people. I've been reading about them. They set out to slay Turks – and very finely they did, when they met them. But when they got east to Levant and Constantinople, were they kind to their brother Christian when they got there? No. They very properly thwacked and trounced them, and took their money, and cut their throats, and ravished their daughters and so left them: for they were Greeks, Jews, Slavs, Vlachs, Magyars, Czechs, and Levantines, and not Gentlemen ... So shall we do, I hope.[91]

Of course, he never made it to the landings themselves. Brooke died rather un-heroically of blood poisoning, probably from an infected mosquito bite, on 23 April 1915, St George's Day. His death aligned Brooke's memory with one national poet, William Shakespeare, as it was also his birthday; and evoked the memory of another, Lord Byron, because both had died in Greece fighting the Ottoman Empire. He rapidly became, as the *Star* put it, 'The youth of our race in symbol'.[92]

In death, then, a wartime legend was born. It is difficult to overstate how Brooke's demise and his poetry combined to form a sort of secular sacrifice to the imagined gods of the country at war, legitimising the further sacrifice of the nation's youth on the battlefields of Europe. This was a propagandist's dream. It presented an idealised, patriotic sense of fatality, and was a narrative that helped to take the sting out of dying for one's country. Churchill's oft quoted eulogy published in *The Times*, Henry James's preface to Brooke's posthumously published travel writings *Letters from America*, George Edward Woodbury's introduction to the 1915 edition of *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, John Drinkwater's *Rupert Brooke: An Essay*, and Eddie Marsh's *Rupert Brooke: A Memoir* of 1918 were all typical expressions of the way that friends and associates of Brooke worked throughout the war to maintain the myth of the heroic warrior-poet, a legend that has lasted well beyond its shelf-life as a propagandist's tool for recruitment and has, since the war, passed into a wider folk history of 'Englishness'. Once more, with Brooke are moving away from anything

[91] Brooke, *The Letters of Rupert Brooke*, p.668.
[92] Christopher Hassell, *Rupert Brooke: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964) p.516.

approaching modernism, and into a more general mood that regarded Brooke as a symbolic figure who represented the idealised sacrifice of Britain's youth in war. Although there is a clear subtext of war as regeneration to this literature, it would be too great a stretch to argue that this all represented maximal modernism. Primarily this is because it was deeply patriotic, and so lacked any dissenting, radical qualities.

Turning to the war poems themselves, as Bernard Bergonzi rightly points out, they 'are works of very great mythic power', and, 'as historical documents, they are an index to the popular state of mind in the early part of the war'.[93] During the war, critical responses were often less well attuned, as the wartime literature on Brooke often demonstrated. As we have seen, Wells and Sassoon referenced Brooke positively, and so did many others. In fact, Brooke's sonnets articulated two interrelated messages, one of resurgent patriotism, and another of youthful revolt typical of Brooke's sensitivity to a culture of death and renewal. In part, then, they did echo the idea of *Le sacre du printemps* in the vernacular of Georgian Poetry. Further, when examining the poems closely, one realises that, whatever one makes of the quality of the verse, the message of youthful revolt that is actually the more prevalent than patriotism.[94]

What is immediately clear from the verses is that they were not manifestations of aesthetic modernism. Rather they represented in a traditional sonnet form the zeitgeist of patriotic youth discovering a sense of purpose to life. If we turn to "I. Peace", the first lines are addressed specifically to those of fighting age. Not only has God 'caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping', but also the whole first stanza articulates a binary opposition between an 'old world', a 'cold' and 'weary' place populated by 'half-men' singing 'dirty songs' and tarnished by the 'emptiness of love', and the new world that had opened up to youth because of the war. War, then, released Brooke's generation from a decadent environment, and they could jump into war 'as swimmers into cleanness leaping'. What we have here, then, is a typically Brookian binary juxtaposing a sense of the dirtiness associated with reality and the cleanliness of an idealised realm, writ large onto the drama of the war. The second stanza then removes the sting from death, describing it as 'sleep', as an 'agony, and that has an ending' and as a 'long peace'. It also presents death as a lesser enemy when compared to the dirty, prewar world. In short, the poem is concerned with youth

[93] Bergonzi, *Heroes Twilight*, p.36.
[94] Brooke, *The Poetical works*, pp.19–23.

rediscovering its autonomy and escaping from a conventional world through danger and death, therefore not patriotism *per se*. Similarly, "II. Safety" concludes that the 'safest of all' the places that the soldier would find himself is located in death, and again Brooke does not dress this up in overtly patriotic language. Evoking the emergence of a nobler era in the present, the third sonnet, "III. The Dead", begins 'Blow out, you bugles, over the rich dead!', and continues by stating this new time was underpinned by the potential of death: 'But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold'. Brooke, then, glorifies the idea of the youthful death because it confers onto the sacrifices of the younger generation – who are spilling nothing less than 'the red / Sweet wine of youth' – a 'higher' quality. Again, according to Brooke this aspect of life is a quality lacking in the generations that immediately preceded them. These blowing bugles, the second stanza continues, 'brought us, for our dearth, / Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain'. Further, because they now have a chance to fight, 'Honour' and 'Nobleness' have returned. From this point, the sonnet concludes, 'we [i.e. youth] have come into our heritage'. The trope of rediscovering a meaningful sense of purpose to life after a period of decline, then, could not be clearer. The fourth sonnet, "IV. The Dead", again idolises the passing of youth into death. Here, to die young will lead to 'a white / Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance, / a width, a shining peace, under the night'. Further, as in the first three sonnets, in "IV. The Dead" we do not see an explicit language of patriotism. Consequently, although it is of course undeniable that an overtly English patriotic reading can easily be applied to all of these poems, and clearly this reading prevailed during the war, it is worth noting that, of the five sonnets, the first four do not explicitly invoke the nation. Rather they are more abstract articulations of youthful revolt, and of rebirth to a higher sense of reality that contrasts with a decadent, older generation. The sentiments of these four sonnets, charged with death and renewal, then, could be felt by any young soldier of the war, not only English fighters.

The final poem, by far the most quoted and, probably, the best known of all of Brooke's poems, "V. The Soldier", is the exception to this pattern. Here, England is articulated six times. This is the nationalising full stop to the series' celebration of the death and rebirth of youth. The flower loving, roaming soldier figure described in the first stanza, a metonym of England, is also clearly autobiographical, a fact revealed to the reader because the figure was 'Washed by the rivers, blessed by the suns of home'. Indeed, for Brooke war was in a way a return to the ideals of Neo-Paganism. What is also interesting is that,

alongside this shift to an openly patriotic register, the poem again concludes with a typically Brookian idealisation of death: it is merely release into a purer, eternal realm. This is an 'English heaven', as he puts it. At a time of heightened patriotic sentiment and of the idealisation of youth, it is no wonder the poem was so successful.

What is ironic about Brooke is that, while the patriotic British press were decrying German figures, such as Friedrich von Bernhardi and Nietzsche, for interpreting history through an idealised lens and for perceiving warfare as an aesthetic experience, the epitome of the nation's identity, and one of its most celebrated figures during the war, lived and died in exactly this manner. Clearly, the war was read by Brooke as an event offering a maximal modernist-style sense of rebirth, though this did not draw out a sense of radicalism in his work. For Brooke personally, the war inculcated a sense of emotional renewal, and he hoped culture and society too would be purged of some of its antinomies. He also revelled in the fantasy of being a central player living at a momentous turning point in the drama of history. Regarding his war sonnets themselves, these were characterised by a number of qualities: detachment from any sense of the material reality of war; a reception that defined them as articulations of superficial, patriotic sentiment; mass reproduction during and after the war that rendered them a clichéd aspect of the war's cultural production; and ultimately manifesting an aesthetic form of lying because they expressed the notion that to die in a modern war was glorious, and death was painless – a view better artists, such as Sassoon and Rosenberg, quickly rejected when developing more challenging responses to, and representations of, the war. Because of this cluster of characteristics, it is not unreasonable to describe Brooke's war sonnets as an immature response to the war, particularly as, rather than becoming artistic masterpieces, they soon became a classic piece of modern wartime kitsch.[95] Unlike Rosenberg and Sassoon, Brooke was not a fringe maximal modernist, despite his diagnosis of decadence within modernity and his articulation of war as a resolution to this crisis. Ultimately, this was due to the lack of authentic radicalism, manifest both in his work and his wider thinking.

[95] For more on aesthetic lying as a definitional aspect of the concept of Kitsch, see: Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) ch.4.

Conclusions

We have seen how a diagnosis of modernity as decadence, alongside a sense of renewed connection to a mythic sensibility as a solution to elemental cultural crisis, was central to all three poets. Naively 'leaping' into 'cleanness', Brooke believed himself to be at a turning point in western history, overturning the fall of Constantinople in 1453. His populist poetry celebrated release from a decadent world, and he revelled in the revolt of youth. Sassoon regarded himself as a martyr figure, initially in a vague manner for his country, then more specifically for the men under his command. It was in their company alone that he found redemption. In his role as the radical artist, he was intent on promoting an aesthetic that would shock the chattering classes into taking the war as seriously as he and those around him took it. From this anger developed a politicised, satirical style of poetry, which this study has identified as his radical confrontation with a decadent modernity. Through this aggressive approach to art, his work helped to inculcate 'the new' in terms of reshaping ideas and moral standards. Finally, identifying primarily with the downtrodden, Rosenberg created extraordinary visions from the chaos of warfare, drawing on his own imagination, alongside Biblical and mythical sources, to articulate this sensitivity to the war's true horrors. In many ways, he epitomised the oppressed – especially in the army where he was persecuted for his Jewishness, his slight build, and his clumsy nature. What is more remarkable still is that he was able to write anything at all; unlike officer poets such as Brooke and Sassoon, Rosenberg had scant access not only to paper and pens, but also to the time and space to write. Determined to distil art from this suffering, his poems talk not only of the horrors of the front line, but they are uniquely able to convey the spiritual confusion the war engendered. They also gave a mythic sense of hope for renewal via remarkable and original visions of modern warfare, especially his extraordinary reworking of the Moses story as an allegory of trench life. By allowing the analysis to move beyond merely identifying each figure as a maximal modernist, then, we have been able to draw out some of the nuances and idiosyncrasies of their responses to the war. Unlike our previous case studies, we have also seen how exposure to the trenches was highly destructive of visions of renewal as a mode of response. Indeed, a sense of hope was far more problematic from within the trenches.

To draw the analysis presented in this chapter together, we can characterise the three different responses thus: In April 1915, Rosenberg published a volume of poetry called *Youth*. In a letter to Eddie Marsh, he described how the poems would be divided into three

sections: '1. Faith and Fear', '2. The Cynic's Lamp' and '3. Sunfire'. The first part was designed to evoke youth in the first flush of idealism, aspiring 'towards purity'; by the second section, youth had became emotionally hardened through bitter experience with life, and so 'he has no more vague aspirations, he is just sense'; then, in the final section, youth is reborn. In 'Change and Sunfire', he told Marsh, 'the spiritualizing takes place. He has no more illusions, but life itself becomes transfigured through Imagination, that is, real intimacy – Love.'[96] Here we also have our three case studies: lacking radical vision, Brooke never transcended the faith and fear stage of artistic representation of the war, and could only aspire towards a vague sense of 'purity'; Sassoon was the embittered poet, and turned this anger into a radical art form, illuminating the moral failures of British society with a 'cynic's lamp'; and Rosenberg had the poetic powers to articulate a complex emotional response to the war, engaging with its metaphysical and material horrors, sometimes offering glimpses of spiritual renovation developing in its wake. Indeed, because Rosenberg could successfully distil artistic representation from its chaos, the war only enriched his 'sunfire', his 'inner' love for mankind. As we have seen, this was his way of becoming his own God, and so Rosenberg was able to act as an aesthetic alchemist sublimating the profound suffering that defined his army existence into highly original poetry. With the outbreak of war, then, all three poets came to regard the prewar world as decadent, and in their idiosyncratic ways (and this was also true of many of Europe's war poets) all three were also able to shore up fragments of art in the face of potential ruin on the battlefield.

Finally, by examining three figures on the edges of the maximal modernist model, we have also been able to understand some of its limits. Rosenberg's poetry especially offers readers a highly complex emotional experience that can only be partially explored by maximal modernism itself. Meanwhile, Brooke clearly falls just outside of the model, due to his lack of radicalism. Also, only some of Sassoon's poetry can be considered as chiming with maximal modernism, his war satires. Elsewhere, he too lacked a radical edge. However, by discussing the relationship each of these poets to the ideal type we have been able to contextualise them in a wider matrix of intellectual responses to the war and a decadent-seeming modernity. Although the maximal modernist model does not pose all the research questions that need to be answered regarding the war's intellectual production, it does help

[96] Rosenberg, *The Collected Works*, p. 211–212.

us identify some common themes and offer a heuristically useful point of departure for discussing a range of case studies. As we have seen, this allows for comparative discussion of similarities and differences in a wide range of cultural production. The following chapter will complete this analysis by firstly offering a comparative discussion of the case studies before opening out the comparative angel further by briefly discussing some pan-European trends during and after the war.

Chapter 7: 'Youth could win, but had not learned to keep'

Having now explored samples of thought from a series of British intellectuals, and surveyed the output of one of the country's most radical Little Magazines of the war era, this final chapter will achieve a number of goals. Firstly, it will use the various dimensions of the maximal modernist ideal type to compare and contrast the highly idiosyncratic case studies thus far analysed by the thesis. Secondly, in the light of this comparative discussion, it will be possible to offer some more general observations regarding trends in British and European cultural production from this era. This aim will be achieved by proposing a further set of conceptual devices that can be added to the cluster of tropes that so far have been highlighted by the maximal modernist model. These tools will help conceptualise the underlying drive of maximal modernist thought, and will identify a causal link between the outbreak of the First World War itself and the growth of maximal modernism among Europe's intellectuals during and after the conflagration. This analysis will combine a highly-speculative cultural anthropology with conclusions concerning the war's cultural production posited by Eric J. Leed in his influential monograph *No Man's Land.* Thirdly, it will ground these speculative conclusions by demonstrating key developments among some major continental instances of maximal modernist thought in the aftermath of the war across Europe. In so doing, it will locate maximal modernist tropes in the works of a diverse range of writers and philosophers, as well as political radicals spanning fascist and communist sympathisers. Finally, in order to argue for further exploration of the links between British and continental intelligentsias, it will locate an emerging secondary literature on the topic of British cultural production in the twentieth century; studies that, as with this thesis, also have also sought to highlight the importance of conceiving British cultural production in continuity with, rather distinguished from, European trends that embraced a wide range of cultures of modernism.

Comparison and contrasts between case studies

The ideal type of modernist thought employed by this study has allowed for a comparative analysis that has embraced a wide range of cultural production, ranging from neo-Marxist

revolutionary ideologies to spiritualism, and from political religion to novels and poetry. Further, by neither offering an essentialist definition of maximal modernist thought nor leaving the term under-defined, and instead developing an internally coherent, heuristically useful model of the concept, this study has been able to offer a level of clarity regarding what the term signifies on a nomothetic level, yet has tempered generalising tendencies by employing an epistemology that has sought to demonstrate nuances and details regarding idiographic instances of thought and behaviour that defy simplistic pigeonholing. Indeed, often the analysis in this thesis has veered off the beaten track in order to reveal the nuances of each case study. As a heuristic construct, then, the ideal type of maximal modernism formulated in the Introduction has proved a productive tool for discussing, comparing and contrasting a diverse range of cultural production, helping to draw out a series of interrelated tropes that were manifest in a highly heterogeneous sample of wartime cultural production. It is worth firstly reviewing how some of the key forms (i.e. political, aesthetic, cultural, philosophical, and religious) and the cluster of inter-related tropes (i.e. modernity as decadence, visionary pessimism, 'organic intellectuals', renewed sense of the transcendent, *kairos*, and palingenesis) central to the maximal model of modernism each found idiosyncratic expression though diffuse philosophies and ideologies in the case studies surveyed by this thesis. This comparative survey will highlight the diversity of thought that has been examined, demonstrating the multi-dimensional viewpoint offered by the maximal modernist paradigm.

In terms of political modernism, A. R. Orage's guild socialism clearly viewed the war as an event that could lead to economic revolution in Britain and abroad. Especially in his weekly editorials, Orage evoked a sense of decadence in British politics, economics and culture that he combined with analyses of various international developments, such as the Russian Revolutions and American intervention in the war. The product of these assorted discussions was the refraction of the war's variegated events through the lens of an ideology that was characterised by a revolutionary neo-Marxism deeply concerned with the creation of a new, spiritually unified era for British society. Other contributors to the journal, especially S. G. Hobson, G. D. H. Cole, and A. J. Penty, were central to the development of plausible theories augmenting the economic rationale of the ideology's revolutionary drive during the war. Further, contributors such as Ivor Brown offered more details on the cultural aspects of capitalism's alleged decadent qualities. Elsewhere, writing in a non-Marxist, left-wing register

H. G. Wells also developed revolutionary answers to political questions during the war. Although he distanced his thinking from guild socialism and Marxism in general because he did not believe in the principle of class warfare, Wells too posited maximal modernist thought that bled into a number of fields, including political modernism. Indeed, Wells foresaw a new World State, both socialist and religious in nature, emerging from what he regarded as the endgame of the era of nation states. His intellectual roots were, therefore, different to those of the guild socialists. The remaining case studies were less overtly political in their behaviour, and their wartime record did not comprise sustained, political engagement. May Sinclair's hope for a redeemed society after the war hinted at a political component but ultimately her vision of spiritual renewal was meta-political in form. However, she did also write some articles on the role of women. Sassoon's protest was a diluted stunt in the end, and his left-wing politics was more a pose than a deeply-held set of opinions. Meanwhile, Brooke had flirted with aspects of politics while at university, but by the time of the war this engagement was not strongly pronounced, indicative of his lack of radicalism. Heavily influenced by aesthetic theories, especially Symbolism, Rosenberg's worldview too was meta-political in nature.

This study has been less interested in aesthetic modernisms of artists such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis – whose artistic visions sought to renovate styles of expression in literature and visual art – as this aspect of modernist culture has been widely discussed elsewhere, for example by Vincent Sherry. However, the ideal type of maximal modernist thought employed here has drawn out the less well-discussed modernist qualities manifest in figures such as Rosenberg and Sassoon, poets not usually discussed in relation to modernism in Britain. Regarding Rosenberg's aesthetic style, in terms of content we find a clear sense of modernity as crisis, for example key tropes in his work included the image of uprooting alongside the world reeking of a decaying god, and his artistic voice attempted to discuss alternate senses of the numinous in the face of this crisis. The chaotic aspect of modernity, then, was a key muse for Rosenberg's aesthetic principles. The epitome of this chaos, the war itself, also inspired him, and he was clear in his letters from the front line that he wanted to allow its horrors to overtake his mind so that he could transform crisis and chaos into art. With Sassoon, because of his courtship of radicalism and left-wing politics, we can identify some political modernist sympathies. However, what was far more central to his artistic voice was his desire to radically confront extant moral standards in order to make

non-combatants understand the novel and horrific nature of warfare under modernity. Contrastingly, Brooke lacked a clearly modernist aesthetic and his war sonnets more clearly fits within a Romantic tradition. Further, his wartime poetic voice also expressed sympathy with a more generalised mood of modernity as decadence. This can be seen in his war sonnets, which articulated the trope of youth escaping bourgeois conformity, and experienced rebirth through a reconnection to a sense of heroic sacrifice. These poems soon took on another key characteristic of the mass and populist cultural production typical of modernity: they became a celebrated example of war kitsch. Meanwhile, Brooke lacked the radicalism to be considered a maximal modernist, and this too could be read into the poems. Regarding Sinclair and Wells we can see two very different readings of the war's significance articulated in non-fiction writings that were then used to inform wartime novels.

We can also see how instances of philosophical and religious modernism were developed by members of the British intelligentsia during the war. Oscar Levy's Nietzschean outpourings in *The New Age* demonstrate an example of a philosophically modernist temperament being introduced by a naturalised continental figure, whereas May Sinclair's *A Defence of Idealism* and Orage's Nietzscheanism each represented important examples of philosophical modernism being developed by indigenous thinkers. For example, deeply concerned with the renewed vigour of rationalism, Sinclair's philosophy clearly operated within the wider revolt against positivism, a fact born out by tropes arguing that western society could be redeemed through a new culture that embraced eastern philosophical texts, alongside a reworking of psychoanalysis, in order for that conceptual framework to allow for a spiritual understanding of the sublimation of the Libido. Further, this elision of psychoanalysis and the transcendent was played out in her fiction, especially the character Michael in *The Tree of Heaven.* Elsewhere, stressing the need for a newly structured form of religious faith more than a renewed sense of spirituality, Wells' *God the Invisible King* was a typical example of what this study has dubbed religious modernism. Here, God was portrayed as a youthful figure, and the new model for the deity was presented as a force that manifested itself through the human mind and human history, thereby eliding cosmic with historic time. As with Sinclair, Wells' theology also found extended expression in his wartime fiction. Further, Wells' new religion was conceived as a political religion, and he argued that his new existential framework would provide renewed ontological stability for western

society, a re-ordering of religious sensibilities that he believed was necessary for the redemption of modern cultures from decadence.

Indeed, fundamental to the ideal type of maximal modernist thought employed by this study has been the notion of modernity as a condition causing the present to be experienced as decadent. As we have seen, this trope was central to each of the case studies examined. Regarding Orage and other guild socialists, the ideology conceived the nation as essentially a spiritual entity, and claimed that capitalism could be defined by the way it rendered the nation decadent. Specifically, the ideology argued that capitalism was characterised by the creation of a schism in the nation's spiritual life, dividing its society into opposing capitalist and proletarian camps. During the war, Orage and others went to great lengths to contrast his vision of a nation reborn into a new, spiritually united form under guild socialism with what they regarded to be the divisive behaviour of capitalist finance. Indeed, Orage's critique of capitalist power considered immoral any profiting by capitalists from the sacrifices of the proletariat, both in the workshop and on the front line. From the perspective of his idiosyncratic variant of teleological socialism, Wells too regarded capitalism as a force of decadence. During the war, he identified the arms trade as a particularly nefarious instance of this trend. He also regarded established religions as decadent, especially in the war years, arguing that they each privileged the nation above universal love for all of mankind. Contrastingly, his new religion would not fall into this trap. Coming from yet another distinct set of intellectual roots, Sinclair also viewed western modernity as decadent, arguing Europeans had lost touch with a spiritual sense of an afterlife. Further, she presented the war as a means for British culture to transcend what she regarded as its spiritual involution, and, according to her philosophy, exposure to danger and even death would lead directly to a reconnection with the sacred. Out of the war poets, Rosenberg's impression of modernity manifesting the odour of a decaying god was perhaps the most visceral identification of decadence. Meanwhile, for Sassoon the war inculcated a new sense of the spiritual alongside an avant-garde identity, which informed his viewpoint that the upper echelons of the army, civilians, and especially politicians had become essentially decadent and morally bankrupt. Finally, although not a true maximal modernist, as with his prewar Neo-Paganism, for Brooke the war offered an opportunity to escape from a sense of *weltschmerz* in British society and to experience once again life as an aesthetic experience.

The theme of visionary pessimism was present too in the case studies explored by this study. Typifying this trope in *The New Age* was Janko Lavrin, whose essay from 1918, "The Tragic Individual", argued that that the war may yet become justifiable if a figure who was articulate enough in what he called tragic idealism could emerge. He juxtaposed this style of thinking with the romantic idealism of Voltaire's Dr Pangloss, for him epitome of the naïvety manifest in Enlightenment notions of progress. Elsewhere in *The New Age*, Oscar Levy's contributions also chimed with this attitude, claiming that the war offered a sniff of fresh air after the metaphorical thunderstorm of centuries of European decadence. Although decidedly non-Nietzschean in his intellectual perspective, when we look at Wells' writings, this tone was also clearly articulated in the closing chapters of *Mr Britling Sees it Through*. After an initial bout of war fever, Britling came to realise that the new sense of spirituality that he believed the war was drawing out in people across Europe could only be understood if one regarded the mass death of youth as a tragedy. Wells also manifested this tenor in his non-fiction output immediately after the war. His analysis of the breakdown of Russia under Communism was intended as a profound warning to the rest of Europe of the decadence that could be unleashed across the entire continent. Meanwhile, *The Salvaging of Civilisation* argued that it was imperative for politicians and intellectuals to grasp the full dimensions of the crisis facing postwar society, calling for a new societal 'cement' in the form of a new Bible for western civilisation. In Sinclair's cultural production, the character of Michael in *The Tree of Heaven* was perhaps her most developed expression of this trope; after a period of opposing the war because he believed it to be a form of mental involution, Michael embraced the idea of relinquishing his individual ego to the cause of the war, and regarded the conflagration as a means to achieve a 'higher' form of spiritual renewal. Rosenberg's poetry, especially later war verses such as "Daughters of War", "Dead Man's Dump" and "The Unicorn" were each clear examples of a poet deeply sensitive to a sense of breakdown in western civilisation, and he articulated this pessimistic tone in both descriptive and mythopoeic registers. Other verse, especially "Moses", counterpointed such a reading of the war with an expression of hope and renewal. Indeed, the transition from the more hopeful tenor of "Moses" to the more crisis ridden interpretation of the war in "The Unicorn" was another important aspect of Rosenberg's war poetry. Meanwhile, Sassoon's realism also captured the sense of war as a truly horrific experience, yet, as his diaries reveal, his poetry did not articulate continued positive experiences of combat. Indeed, as with Sinclair, for

Sassoon exposure to extreme danger at the front line actually inculcated nebulous spiritual sensations. Broadly speaking, a similar 'inner' journey that was marked by a spiritual sense of rebirth characterised Brooke's brief war experiences. However, his verse did not radically engage with a melancholic mood felt by many to characterise the age, and so Brooke could not articulate an authentic sense of visionary pessimism. This failure to move beyond a naïve, romanticised embrace of the war was one of the reasons why the poems came to manifest a kitsch quality – specifically, they became an aesthetic form of lying.

Although all of these case studies attempted in some fashion to act as 'organic intellectuals' in a broad sense, propagating ideas that clashed with the perspectives of established political and cultural authorities, it is also important to emphasise that mostly these respective 'wars of position' were far more elaborate than any wartime 'wars of manoeuvre'. Indeed, because his verse was clearly not altogether radical and so was quickly adopted as nationalist propaganda, the most spectacular failure in this regard was again Brooke. As we have seen, although patriotism was actually the lesser of the two messages that these poems articulated, they were not necessarily read primarily as celebrations of the revolt of youth at the time. Drawing on the Gramscian terminology, then, Brooke's 'organic' idea of the rebellion of youth was co-opted for the 'traditional' purpose of encouraging unquestioning patriotic duty. We should also regard the more conventional 'organic intellectuals' represented by the Marxist-based guild socialist as failures too. During the war, Orage, Hobson, Cole, Penty, Brown and others were genuine believers in the ideology's historicism, and were convinced that an economic revolution could emerge from the seemingly epoch shifting events. Interestingly, in the years immediately following the conflagration, guild socialism experienced greater interest, though by the early 1920s all the leading protagonists of the movement began to search for new forms of maximal modernist thought in order to continue their ultimate goal of imbuing British culture and society with senses of 'the new'.[1] The war, then, ultimately destroyed the era of guild socialism, not the era of capitalism. Meanwhile, from his non-Marxist socialist perspective, a sense of failure of ideals also characterised Wells' hope for a World State and a new religion to emerge from the conflagration. As a key member of the intelligentsia promoting the need for a League of Nations after the war, the realisation of this institution after the war could be regarded as a success for Wells' publicism. However, as we have seen, Wells was highly disparaging

[1] See S. T. Glass, *The Responsible Society: The Ideas of the English Guild Socialists* (London: Longman, 1966) ch.6.

regarding the way the league was rendered in reality, and his wartime visions for the renewal of western society through the creation of new international institutions that would supersede the era of nation states, alongside his new religious sensibility, remained fictional. Turning to Sinclair's philosophy, this too failed to achieve a widespread readership, although her novels were more commercially successful. To what extent the full scope of the spiritual ideals implicit in these novels were picked up at the time is unclear. However, judging by the lack of academic interest to date in the synergy between her philosophy and her fiction, it is likely that her calls for a renewal of philosophical idealism to redeem British culture and society also remained esoteric knowledge during the war years. Sassoon's poetry had a greater impact on people's thinking regarding the war, and we do find him referenced in wartime cultural production, such as Wells' *Joan and Peter.* Further, along with Rosenberg and especially Wilfred Owen, Sassoon's verse now forms part of a canon of poems that have helped to destroy heroic conceptions of warfare, at least within the literary imagination. Unlike Orage, Wells and Sinclair, then, the later war poets have achieved a genuine cultural 'war of manoeuvre'. Clearly, their descriptions of the trenches have informed notions of modern combat for many subsequent generations, students of wartime cultural production who have long forgotten guild socialism, Wells' invisible king and May Sinclair's vortex.

In terms of a renewed sense of the transcendent, we have also repeatedly seen this trope manifest in idiosyncratic forms in the case studies explored by the study. Indeed, Orage was deeply concerned with this phenomenon before the war, as exemplified by his writings on Nietzsche, especially his tri-partite model of consciousness, animal, human and super-human. Further, guild socialist ideology was keen to highlight that its alternate modernity would return a sense of spiritual unity to the nation, a sensibility that had been denigrated by the emergence of capitalism. Consequently, many of the teleological versions of British history proposed by guild socialists were marked by the trope of a spiritually desirable quality manifest in the Middle Ages that had eroded as a result of capitalist modernity and that would be recreated in their alternate guild socialist future. For guild socialists, then, their revolt against positivism was rooted not merely in a rejection of the Enlightenment, but rather a rejection of European history since the Renaissance, and they believed a renewed sense of the transcendent would emerge after an economic revolution. Eschewing Nietzsche, Wells developed another maximal modernist vision of transcendence of a decaying world. According to his postwar work *The Outline of History*, European

civilisation had entered a period of flux that had begun with the French Revolution, which had reached a period of particular intensity during the war, but even after the war Europe had failed to transcend this period of transition. When we re-read his wartime fiction through the lens of his political philosophy, we see the wider significance of repeated instances of the trope of a renewed connection with God resulting from the horrors of combat, a new sense of the sacred that was capable of offering redemption to western society after the war. As with guild socialists, then, Wells' writings articulated a conversion to a new sense of the transcendent. However, achieving this socio-spiritual revolution in wider society remained an unrealised blueprint. Meanwhile, Sinclair's interest in psychoanalysis and her promotion of a refined sublimation of the Libido – in so doing connecting with a higher 'Reality' – formed another idiosyncratic illustration of a modernist intellectual constructing a renewed sense of the transcendent during the war; in her case by using the latest psychoanalytical arguments to create new readings of texts such as *The Upanishads*. Echoing Sinclair, Sassoon also demonstrated a sense of reconnecting with a transcendent, mystical 'Reality' in the trenches. Meanwhile, especially by drawing on the aesthetic ideals of Symbolism, Rosenberg's poetry conceived the imagination cultivated by art to be a transcendent realm, and so his writings offered a sense of refuge into this poetic sphere; an escape into an inner world where he could literally become god. For him, this strategy could offer transcendence of noumenal reality into 'sunfire'. Finally, for Brooke, getting a commission was akin to being elevated to a new level of consciousness, and myriad young soldiers such as himself turned 'as swimmers into cleanness leaping, Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary'. As we have seen, this poetic voice fell outside of the maximal modernist model.

Brooke, then, was also deeply sensitive to the war as not merely a 'sense of an ending', but also of the war offering a new beginning, and so experienced moments of *kairos* emerging from the flow of rational *chronos* of western history. His poetic soldier identity was energised especially by stories of crusaders, and, echoing the widespread trend among intellectuals to initially conceive the war though historicist rationales, he felt a mythic sense of destiny in his journey to Constantinople. Sassoon too found a renewed sense of the spiritual in France, and by early 1917 his war experiences were even inculcating within his worldview a sense of martyrdom. Finally, Rosenberg regarded the war as a continuation of the crisis of western modernity, á scenario that modernist artists such as Expressionists had

attempted to articulate in a higher, aesthetic register. During the war, he continued this viewpoint, especially through his tropes of a decadent god and the image of uprooting. Increasingly, his wartime verse focused on the chaotic rather than hopeful aspects of the culture of modernity and the conflagration. Regarding the 'sense of an ending' alongside moments of poetic *kairos* among guild socialists, for these figures the war clearly offered an event whereby European politics and society could be conceived as in a melting pot. Further, as with Brooke, for guild socialists the war appeared as a manifestation of a special time that was infused with lessons from the past which pointed to the potential for a new beginning and a new future for Britain and the west. The same can be said for Wells' political and religious modernism. The epitome of his own idiosyncratic infusion of a reading of the past with a teleological thesis for the future can be found in his *The Outline of History*. This work was the culmination of many of his wartime ideas, and, as we have seen, during the war itself he also attempted to locate the significance of the conflagration within a wider narrative of history, presenting the hostilities in terms of an interregnum between two eras. With May Sinclair, this political quality was less distinct. However, both *Tasker Jevons* and *The Tree of Heaven* articulated a binary distinction between a prewar Britain falling into decay, and a wartime world where problems and even existential questions were resolved. *A Defence of Idealism* also argued in a philosophic register for the renewal of a sense of spirituality in western society, another instance of the trope of a new beginning in British wartime cultural production. Finally, the sense of a higher, spiritual reality that she experienced in Belgium in 1914, and later explored through her fictional characters, offers us further examples of the crisis of war opening up pockets of time that manifested a higher sense of the transcendent, moments of *kairos* outside the flow of ordinary *chronos*.

Because each case study manifested many of the central cluster of tropes that, so far, we have seen comprised maximal modernist thinking, they also tended to offer engagement with a (possible or unachievable) desire for a palingenetic, rather than progressive, sense of change. Guild socialist ideology argued for socio-economic palingenesis through a shift in power relationships at the economic base of society, which would create a new culture and a new modernity. For guild socialists, this alternate modernity would be socially unified and would be characterised by a new sense of spiritual harmony. Similarly, Wells offered palingenetic political revolution, both material and spiritual in nature. His ideology argued for a new religion that would redeem western society. For the war poets, the terrible realities

of conflagration were mutated into 'higher' poetic form, itself a testament to the power of the imagination over material reality. Brooke took on this task somewhat naïvely, and his poems offered little aesthetic innovation regarding the idea of war offering youth a highly romanticised sense of sacrifice and death for a mythic, higher purpose. Nevertheless, they were clear expressions of war as rebirth. Elsewhere, palingenetic solutions were less clearly articulated. Sassoon attempted to use realistic verse to highlight the change for the worst in Britain's moral sensibilities, while the sense of community he engaged with in the army helped him perceive himself as an avant-garde figure: the radical soldier poet. Rosenberg created artistically mythic refuges that allowed him access to the 'higher' realm of the imagination, a world for him distinctly above and apart from the grizzly realities of a war that eventually killed him. Some of his poems, especially "Moses" were more explicit in the need for a fundamental sense of regeneration, whereas others such as "The Unicorn" talked to the sense of the war as elemental crisis with a solution that had yet to be even embryonically formulated. Meanwhile, regarding death itself, according to Sinclair's philosophy, this represented the transcendence of one's individual existence and a reconnection with the one 'Infinite Spirit'. Once again, then, we see an idiosyncratic articulation of the trope of palingenesis. Of course, as this survey of the highly diverse forms of thinking offered by these case studies has demonstrated, this quest for redemption as an escape from a decadent modernity was not a homogeneous phenomenon, and took multiple, often conflicting and contradictory, forms.

Clearly, then, the need to experience the war as a form of modernity descending into an inescapable crisis, or for it to signify the need for personal and societal palingenesis, was an important theme in the cultural production surrounding the First World War. Indeed, the two themes were often complex and interconnected. Many intellectual figures across Europe rationalised the conflict through the lens of an escape from bourgeois comfort that offered the potential for fundamental renewal of some description, a tenor highlighted by Robert Wohl's notion of a spontaneous generation of 1914, alongside Roland Stromberg's emphasis on a Weberian sense of re-enchantment as a result of the outbreak of the war. Modris Eksteins even invokes the metaphor of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* to help conceptualise this phenomenon. One way that we can develop further conceptual sophistication concerning reasons why the war drew out wide-ranging readings of modernity as decadence, and therefore needing elemental revitalisation, is to build upon Eksteins' analogy of the war

as a primordial ritual. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, we can regard the war's maximal modernist cultural production as akin to a rite of transition and rebirth – a strategy that has already born fruit for Eric J. Leed. In order to develop this cultural anthropological approach as a means to explain the growth of maximal modernism during and after the First World War, we can also draw on some of the conclusions formulated in Leed's pioneering work concerning soldier experiences. This turn to cultural anthropology will offer a further dimension to the maximal modernism paradigm and will help us develop a causal link between the emergence of maximal modernism and the effects of the war.

Speculative anthropology of wartime modernist thought

The model of maximal modernism outlined in the Introduction was developed from a range of theorists and thinkers, from Max Weber to Zygmunt Bauman, and so the ideal type itself clustered together a range of tropes drawn from these cultural theorists. These tropes were not only heuristically useful in their own right, but collectively they also helped to reinforce the relevance of the other tropes in the cluster. Therefore, this form of conceptual clustering lends itself to further augmentation from different schools of thought. In this methodologically plural spirit, we can build on the model by adding a further set of conceptual themes: liminlity, revitalisation movements and mazeway re-synthesis. This additional terminology will help us to understand the historical importance of the war on the wider maximal modernist trends across the continent, and allow us to postulate a conceptual link between the war itself and the growth of maximal modernism throughout Europe during and after the First World War.

In his monograph *No Man's Land*, Leed was influenced by many cultural theorists, including the ideas of Victor Turner. In so doing, he characterises the cultural dynamics of the experience of the soldier during the First World War as marked by a sense of what Turner's anthropology calls liminality. Before examining Leed's conclusions regarding the impact of the war on European mentalities, it is worth rehearsing in some detail the suggestive cultural anthropological lens through which Leed analyses the cultural dynamics of the war. In so doing it is also worth augmenting Turner's model through the supplementary and cognate perspective of fellow cultural anthropologist Anthony Wallace. Outlining a paradigm for understanding how a range of cultures, from tribal communities to modern urban societies, have structured rationalisations of fundamental transition, Turner's

anthropology is itself heavily influenced by the ground-breaking work of Arthur van Gennep. By drawing on van Gennep's model of *rites de passage* – rituals of transition underpinned initially by tropes of disaggregation from extant societal norms followed by tropes propagating senses of reaggregation and a revitalised way of life[2] – Turner's work emphasises the importance of a mental state rationalising transition that he called 'liminality'. In modern contexts, this mentality could be adopted by cultural producers who conceive themselves subjectively as existing between two distinct eras, therefore in a state of transition between two differing understandings of what constitutes societal norms and standards; subjectively, they are somewhere in between a sense of disaggregation and one of reaggregation.

Turner's model of the psychology of transitional cultures argues that a liminal mentality also has a communal form, claiming that various cultures generated by people who believed themselves to exist during a period of fundamental change are marked by a renewed sense of the sacred, increased emotive bonds between individuals that inculcated a new sense of fraternal bonding, and that such characteristics and renewed senses of community are features expressed especially between fellow 'liminal people'. Turner dubs this renewed sense of community between 'liminal people' – a sense of comity rationalising collective sensitivity to fundamental transition – '*communitas*'. His thesis claims that the dialectic between what he called 'structured society', i.e. the world experienced as stability and order, and a state of *communitas* could be interpreted, to greater or lesser extents, in all human societies. Individuals and sub-cultures marked by senses of *communitas*, then, perceive themselves as 'outsiders' who instinctively develop alternate visions articulating prospective new forms of structured society, and so enthusiastically seek to realise novel sets of cultural and societal norms in order to 'revitalise' their community. Consequently, regarding the characteristic features of the psychology of individuals within *communitas* movements, Turner claims that people marked by a state of liminality believe themselves to be 'reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life'.[3] Further, people manifesting sensitivity to a

[2] Gennep argued that *rites de passage* contained three discrete stages: first, separation; second, a liminal or limbo period in which a fundamental change occurs; and finally re-incorporation into the community, with the individual in question now holding a fundamentally revised role. See Arthur van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 1960).

[3] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), p.95.

liminal state of mind often feel a more profound and subjective sense of the sacred, and seek a reconnection with an allegedly 'purer' understanding of the transcendent. Ultimately, according to Turner, the cultures created by *communitas* movements offer 'a symbolic milieu that represents both a grave and a womb', and so tropes of death and birth become elided in myriad powerful and emotive ways of thinking marked by senses of profound destruction and visions of creation.[4]

Augmenting Turner's suggestive, although of course ultimately speculative, conceptual framework with the ideas of Anthony Wallace, here we find another anthropology that models the cultural dynamics of radical change. Like Turner, Wallace is also acutely sensitive to the psychological problems created by sensations of rapid transition and sudden traumas. One key concept underpinning Wallace's conceptual framework is the 'mazeway', a term broadly synonymous with a worldview.[5] Wallace elaborates this concept by asserting the mazeway is a mental construct in constant need of active reconstruction in order to maintain various correspondences between the noumenal world and the internal mazeway. Failure to maintain a credible relationship between the mazeway and noumenal reality results in increased states of stress, alongside feelings of alienation. One potential consequence of rapid alterations and traumatic experiences in the material realm is the potential to spark a specific phenomenon whereby people attempted to radically alter their mazeways in a single jump, rather than through the normal processes of piecemeal updating and alteration, a process that Wallace calls 'mazeway re-synthesis'. Further, the variegated cultural trends that attempt mazeway re-synthesis for entire cultures and societies are called 'revitalisation movements' in Wallace's anthropology. What differentiates revitalisation movements from cultural patterns engaging with piecemeal senses of change is, to use the terminology employed by this study, their palingenetic dynamic. Revitalisation movements, then, project a vision of total change into the near future, and what are usually considered long-term and gradual shifts in cultural and political arrangements are conceived as occurring in one decisive, revolutionary switch. Often, the trope of identifying societal 'sickness' in the present and its 'health' in their alternate vision for its future, alongside renewed senses of the sacred, are central aspects of the cultures of revitalisation movements according to Wallace.

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[4] Ibid., p.96.

[5] See: Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Revitalizations and Mazeways: Essays on Cultural Change, Volume 1* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) p.170.

From this excursus into cultural anthropology we can add to the maximal modernist model tropes of liminality, revitalisation movements and mazeway re-synthesis. In order to ground this point, we can turn to Leed's analysis of the First World War, as outlined in *No Man's Land*. Here, we can see that Leed drew on Turner's phenomenological anthropology, and he argues that the cultural dynamics of soldiers during the First World War were often marked by an underlying liminal mentality. In terms of cultural backcloth, Leed again highlights the importance of the general mood of optimism that greeted the war, and, chiming with Wohl's description of a generation of 1914, Leed argued that this community of 1914 'can be identified with that type of community that Victor Turner has called "existential" or "spontaneous" *communitas*, a type that is peculiar to states of transition'.[6] Further, echoing Mosse's emphasis on the war creating a myth of the 'new man' who was drenched in redemptive qualities, Leed also emphasises that a key trope among soldiers of all sides was the trend of talking of their prewar lives as 'dead' after reaching the trenches because the army initially offered escape from the structured society of bourgeois life. As the war drew on, however, the myth that had initially suggested that this 'civilian death' would lead to a new and more appealing life in the army introduced millions of soldiers to a far more confused mentality. Once enlisted, then, many combatants of all sides came to develop profound senses of estrangement from prewar society and civilian life, alongside deep ambivalence regarding their new soldierly identities. On the one hand, army life provided a realm where they were accepted and felt to be as one – a new brotherhood. Yet on the other hand, it promised an ultimately thankless, anonymous and meaningless death and placed individuals in a realm that was indescribably atrocious and terrifying. Emphasising these negative qualities regarding lasting impressions of the trenches, Leed's analysis notes that tropes of invisibility, filth, burial and pollution were key themes both among veterans and in postwar literature. Further, familiarity with and the closeness of death became significant components within the identity of many ex-soldiers, marking their fundamental distinction between the social reality of the war veteran and that of their now defunct prewar 'home'. Although positive identities and memories could be constructed and recalled, especially regarding notions of 'comradeship', the most unsettling aspect of the conflagration for soldiers, as stressed by Leed's analysis, was the way war experiences tended to manifest

[6] Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p.44.

incomplete *rites de passage*. The purpose of such rationalisations of transition is ultimately to imbue individuals with new and positive senses of community, yet the experiences of First World War combat tended to result in an extended sense of liminality. For many soldiers, then, the sense of disaggregation, of being ground down and awaiting a new identity was never credibly augmented by a sense of reaggregation and a new order after the war. Indeed, the lasting trauma of the war experience for many soldiers emanated from tensions surrounding an inescapable feeling of being 'outside' what Turner terms structured society when they returned to civilian existence. Soldiers had been prepared for initiation into a new community as a result of their experiences in the trenches, yet were never credibly reborn into this reality, thereby rendering them profoundly 'homeless' and unable to achieve 'closure' regarding their horrific experiences. 'No "rites of reaggregation"', Leed concludes, 'could efface the memory of utter defencelessness before authority and technology. No ceremonial conclusion to the war could restore the continuities it had ended, or recreate those "fictions" that had been left behind in the labyrinth of the trenches.'[7]

However, Leed's work does not discuss at length how many radical intellectuals outside the trenches also conceived the war as a vast *rite de passage* for western society. As we have seen in Britain, guild socialists and other contributors to *The New Age*, Wells, Sinclair, Sassoon, Brooke and even Bertrand Russell, regarded the conflict during the 1914 – 18 period through the lens of the death of an old world and the need for a new one to emerge. These highly idiosyncratic readings of the war's events were each characterised by the trend to frame the conflagration as a state of liminality between two eras, and ultimately many maximal modernists hoped that war would ultimately lead to the formation of a new world of some description. As with soldiers, then, so too many within the radical intelligentsia: they too experienced the outbreak of war as a form of spontaneous *communitas*; they too were in rebellion against structured society; they too sought fundamental societal and cultural change from the horrors of the conflict; and they too believed that the postwar world needed to be defined by a revitalised sense of community. However, although prewar reality was largely destroyed, the postwar era failed to match the heightened expectations for change, and again hopes for re-syntheses of European culture and society that were generated by myriad intellectuals in 1914 remained unrealised. By 1918, for many intellectuals European culture

[7] Ibid. p.213.

and society seemed closer to death than new life; as Wells put it, after the war Europe was akin to a patient recovering from major surgery. Instead of revelling in the new order, the very survival of the continent was even more profoundly in question by the war's end, a fear leading to the creation of works articulating this crisis and the potential of the continued decline of Europe. Such works are not difficult to identify, and ranged from T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" to Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West.* In Britain, aesthetic modernists such as Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and Virginia Woolf tapped into this deep seated sense of decline, a cultural milieu far more pessimistic regarding a switch to a new world than had previously existed. More generally, many maximal modernists after the war were thrown into a new crisis, describing the profound loss of an old world, and with some programmatically reaching out for a new one.

From this cultural anthropological perspective, then, we can see more clearly why wartime and postwar maximal modernism was marked by liminality and sometimes palingenesis to solve Europe's crisis of elemental transition. The war itself greatly augmented sensitivities to modernity as decadence. Yet, perhaps simply because of its sheer magnitude, the conflagration could all too easily be rationalised as a state of transition to a new order, and so a myth of renewal could be used to make sense of the mass destruction. For many intellectual figures that were already deeply critical of modernity, then, the promotion of a liminal mentality was not created by the war alone, but this attitude was greatly enhanced by it. Further, echoing the mood that Leed identified in the psychology of many of the war's soldiers, the European intelligentsia by the end of the war could not credibly believe that western society had been reborn as a result of the conflagration. Therefore, to continue the anthropological analogy, intellectuals too came to regard the war as an incomplete *rite de passage.* By augmenting Leed's analysis with Wallace's conceptual language, we can tentatively assert that, when searching for programmatic models for change, maximal modernist thought of this era can be seen as function akin to a diverse set of revitalisation movements attempting idiosyncratic mazeway re-syntheses of European identities, mentalities and worldviews. Through this speculative lens, one can start to comprehend, at least on an abstract level, the profound emotional shock of the war on European culture and thought. Taking our case studies as emblematic of wider trends, some maintained public engagement in order to push for change; Wells offers a clear example of this trend. Others came to believe that there was no immediate escape from a decadent modernity; Orage exemplifies

this trend. And finally, some disappeared back into a bourgeois world where they were at least buffered from modernity, yet could never shake off their wartime experiences; Sassoon is a clear example of this postwar pattern.

By augmenting the maximal modernist model with this anthropological discussion, then, this final chapter has been able to offer an attempt to describe on a nomothetic level the psychological impact the war had on European thinking. *Pace* any potential post-modernist criticisms of these admittedly highly generalised assertions, as with the paradigm of modernist thought employed by this study, this claim is meant merely as *a* heuristic description of postwar European thinking, postulated as a discussion suggestive of further research regarding the categories of transition, spiritual crisis, and renewal manifest in wartime cultural products. Therefore, it has not been formulated to reductively offer *the* definitive grand-narrative of the highly complex and multi-faceted scenario it attempts to describe. Nevertheless, this perspective is relevant to further study because it highlights that many radical intellectuals, in Britain and in Europe, regarded the continent as ground down and in a state of liminality, both as a consequence of the ostensible decadence of modernity, and especially as a result of the war itself. Thus, through this lens we can see that radical pockets of *communitas* developed within the discourses of many European intellectuals as a result of the war, impregnating the cultural sensibilities of the era with a sense of an unresolved transition to a new world.

Some European parallels of maximal modernism as cultural 'mazeway resynthesis'

In order to mark out some of the parameters of this wider trend of maximal modernists responding to the sense of modern liminality induced by the First World War, the following brief discussion will highlight just a few indicative figures from interwar Europe who should be considered a part of this general intellectual and cultural trend. This is not meant as a comprehensive survey; rather it will offer as a small, representative sample of intellectuals that could also be considered maximal modernists according to the parameters of the model. By so doing, it is possible to locate the cultural production examined by this thesis within concerns articulated by myriad continental intellectuals.

One does not have to look far in order to locate wide-ranging senses of the war as a form of disaggregation from bourgeois structured society. For example, many writers tapped

into this general mood. In France, Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* concludes with a chapter set in the dawn after a great battle. Drawing out how the profound sense of confusion among soldiers struggling to make sense of their new realities resulted in a worldview that instinctively foresaw combat leading to a truly revolutionary moment in European history, the *poilu* 'wanted to know and see beyond the present time', and while they raise their war weary bodies from the chaos of the battle, 'they tried to give birth to a light of will and wisdom in themselves. Scattered conviction sailed around in their heads and vague fragments of beliefs emerged from their lips.'[8] Barbusse himself was also politicised by the conflagration, and he formed the *Clarté* grouping to unite left-wing radicals after the war, a society attended by British intellectuals such as Wells, Shaw and Sassoon. Elsewhere in French cultural production, Georges Duhamel's *The New Book of Martyrs* argues that the future of the world could be marked by a valid sense of morality if it could once again tap into a sense of love for fellow mankind that he attempted to articulate through descriptions of the wounded and dying soldiers. Indeed, Duhamel believed that, ultimately, it was the suffering of the wounded that could redeem France from her complicity in the war. Therefore, he argues that, from 'having looked you [i.e. the wounded and the dead] in the face at the height of your sufferings, I have conceived a religious hope for the future of our race'. He clearly also regards the war as a time devoid of any sense of normality, arguing that 'Humanity has entered the wild beast's cage, and sits there with the patient courage of the lion-tamer'; and concludes with lines that hint towards what this study has dubbed religious modernism: 'Union of pure hearts to meet the ordeal! Union of pure hearts that our country may know and respect herself! Union of pure hearts for the redemption of the stricken world!'[9] Both these examples offer excellent case studies of French writers developing maximal modernist themes in their works.

Meanwhile, responding to the sense of crisis in Germanic culture as a consequence of modernity and especially the war, Hermann Broch's novel *The Sleepwalkers* narrates what he regarded as the break-up of German society roughly between 1880 and 1918 via a three-part novel, each with its own protagonist. Written later in the interwar period, 1932, the book very broadly mirrored guild socialist readings of history as decline, the final section is

[8] Henri Barbusse (translated by Robin Buss), *Under Fire* (London: Penguin Books, 2003) pp.308–9.
[9] Georges Duhamel, *Vie des Martyrs, 1914-1916* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1930). For an English translation, from which these quotes were taken, see: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4325 [last accessed: 19/09/2007].

even interpolated with a multi-part essay called "The Decay of Values" which locates a slow ebbing away of spiritual certainty within the flow of European history, a sense of decadence dating from the Renaissance onwards. For Broch, the decay of spiritual certainties had now rendered the mentality of modern man a nightmare reality, a mindscape devoid of certainty and purpose. The book ends with a call for the emergence of a new leader, a paternal figure capable of taking humanity by the hand to 'give a new meaning to the incomprehensible events of the age', thereby lifting it from the existential uncertainty of postwar modernity so 'that Time can begin anew'.[10] In a similar tenor, Robert Musil also explores the themes of societal decadence under modernity, alongside the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in his masterwork *The Man Without Qualities.* Here, the novel's protagonist, Ulrich, is presented as a figure profoundly attuned to the modern condition, experiencing it as a dislocation from any sense of absolute truth or higher order. The second part of the novel satirises various attempts to offer a sense of unity to life, mazeway re-syntheses to use Wallace's analogy, that are proposed through an ultimately doomed celebration of the seventieth year of Franz Joseph's reign, scheduled for 1918. As a reader, we know the story is set in the last days of the Habsburg's reign and that the celebrations will never come to pass, thereby emphasising that the various visions for emotive senses of renewal for the crumbling empire would only result in failure, symbolic of the wider failure to re-invest a decadent modernity with a sense of overarching purpose. This is Ulrich's lasting impression of the modern world, a liminal reality marked by detachment from any sense of 'higher' order, forming what this study has dubbed a decadent reality.

Contrasting engagement with modernity's decadence in literature, many of the figures operating within Europe's radical interwar intelligentsia articulated their desires for socio-cultural renewal via particularistic, nationalist registers. Indeed, the radical intelligentsia that formed around far-right solutions to modernity as decadence should be seen as broadly cognate with the far-left's equally radical attempts to transcend the postwar era of political and cultural instability. For example, the rise to prominence of fascist ideologues in the interwar years demonstrates the link between maximal modernist ideologies and cultural production. Perhaps the clearest example of this trend immediately after the war can be found in Gabriele D'Annunzio's proto-Fascist occupation of Fiume. To those 'outside' his

[10] Herman Broch (translated by Willa and Edwin Muir), *The Sleepwalkers* (New York, Vintage International, 1996) p.647.

worldview, which claimed to promote the 'renewal' of the Latin people, his politics appears absurd, yet D'Annunzio was adamant that the ten new corporations underpinning his new free state would manifest 'the collective will and the common effort of all the people towards an ever increasing level of material and spiritual vitality'.[11] Across Europe, many far right figures emerged articulating tropes of Europe's rebirth through radical nationalism, which, when combined with a palingenetic, revolutionary dimension, clearly another variant of maximal modernism. This was equally true for fascists operating in the less modernised, eastern parts of the continent. To take an extreme example, in Hungary Zoltán Böszörmény developed an ultra-nationalist ideology which saw his ostensible poetry and far-right politics blended and fuelled by the romantic ideal of the artist as genius. This admixture was combined with a political modernist energy that sought societal renewal for Hungary. Ultimately, this caused Böszörmény to create the revolutionary, ultra-nationalist party, the Scythe Cross as a radical alternate to Horthy's regime in interwar Hungary. In Romania, Corneliu Codreanu was perhaps the most compelling of these charismatic, eastern European ultra-nationalist political modernists.[12] These examples highlight a more general opinion that views fascism as a form of maximal modernism; as Eksteins concluded, the rise of Nazism was the most advanced example of the embrace of modernism as an answer to modernity's alleged decadence in the interwar years. Regarding German intellectuals, Ernst Jünger furnishes us with another example of a writer whose cultural production, especially *Storm of Steel*, offers a representation of the war as a positive experience, and whose interwar politics embraced far-right political modernism. Meanwhile, Martin Heidegger's existentialism and brief active support for the Nazi regime represents a further instance of a maximal modernist thinker blending philosophy with politics, as so we can see that his sensitivity to modernity's spiritual decadence informed his highly symbolic political praxis. Even in the British case we can see some examples of the synergy between far-right solutions to modernity's alleged decadence and leading high modernist intellectuals. Wyndham Lewis wrote a book praising the dynamism of Nazism, while Ezra Pound eventually found himself

[11] Gabriele D'Annunzio in Roger Griffin, *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.36.

[12] For a full length discussion on the relationship between a sense of liminality and the political religion developed by Codreanu and his cohort in the Legion of the Archangel Michael, see: Paul Jackson, "'We killed in ourselves a world in order to raise another, high as the sky": Corneliu Codreanu's *For My Legionaries (The Iron Guard)* as a case study in fascist ideological production', for *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj* no.45 (2006) pp.139–168.

giving broadcasts for the Italian Fascists during the Second World War on the crisis manifest in capitalist economics and the Fascist solution.

Across Europe, intellectuals were equally inspired by political modernist urges gravitating to the radical left. Indeed, the likes of Lenin and Trotsky inspired many left-wing revolutionaries to foment revolution in central and eastern Europe. Bela Kun's short-lived republic, alongside the Spartacus Party in Germany, offer us two examples of the dramatic increase in far-left political modernism immediately after the war. To cite just one example of a radical left-wing thinker who elided sensitivity societal decadence under modernity with fictional representation of the war, we can turn to Jaroslav Hašek. In his unfinished satiric novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, Hašek, an anarchist who had also briefly served as a member of the Red Army before his return to Czechoslovakia after the war, presents the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a realm befuddled with bureaucratic incompetence and decadence. For example, early on in the book, Švejk spends some time as the batman for a drunken and atheistic priest, while later escapades see the central protagonist outwit his ostensible superiors by following their orders to the letter, resulting in farcical episodes. The war as prosecuted by the Austro-Hungarians, then, is framed as a comedy of errors by Hašek. Despite being officially classified as an idiot, Švejk appears unhampered by the strictures of the decaying 'structured society' manifest by the Habsburg Empire, repeatedly outwitting the seemingly absurd logic and behavior of its myriad officials. Hašek's biography and fiction, then, represents many key aspects of maximal modernism after the war: the fusion of art and politics, a critique of the present order that draws out its decadent qualities, and a sense that radical change is possible that was grounded in a genuinely shifting historical reality.

Finally, regarding radical left-wing philosophy, we can turn to Ernst Bloch's extraordinary reworking of Marxism. Here, we find perhaps the most elaborate fusion of differing styles of thought in order to offer a Marxist solution to the antinomies of postwar modernity. In his 1918 volume *The Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch outlined his theory of revolutionary action in its final chapter, "Karl Marx: Death and the Apocalypse".[13] Bloch described how Marxist revolutionary thought needed to be fused with a numinous element drawn from Christianity alongside a non-Christian, mystical conception of the afterlife of the soul. Rejecting Kantian warnings against speculation on the dynamics of metaphysical realities of

[13] Ernst Bloch (translated by Anthony A. Nassar), *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) pp.233–78.

life after death, Bloch sketched a model of the metempsychosis, or rebirth, of souls in the future. Ultimately, his schema argued that revolutionary action in the present would reward individuals even if they failed to live to see the new world in their own lifetimes because they would be reborn into the spiritually unified future. In Bloch's hands, then, the materialist historicism of Marxism was transformed into a metaphysical journey narrating the transcendence of humanity to its ultimate spiritual destiny. Only from the position of this revolutionary Gnosticism, a fusion between religious, philosophical and political modernisms, would it be possible to unite the disparate realms of the inner spiritual world and the outer material one, currently divided under capitalism, according to Bloch.

This whirlwind tour of some of the religious, cultural, political and philosophical modernist aspects present in European cultural history during the interwar period has been offered as an indicative description of the diversity of ideas that can be considered part of the maximal modernist paradigm in interwar Europe. These figures, and many others, each perceived modernity as decadent, as liminal. Some of these intellectuals, such as Musil, revelled in the failure of attempted regeneration, whereas others, such as Bloch, postulated extravagant forms of re-synthesis of the decadent world. Despite such multiplicity of viewpoints, then, it is also possible to see common patterns in the thought of these highly diverse cultural producers. As well as being clearly idiosyncratic intellectuals, such radicals were also attempting to tap into nebulous senses of *communitas*, and so maximal modernists after the war formed broad communities of artists and thinkers who were in revolt against the decadent-seeming sensibilities of structured society. Such cultural products could either attempt to effect myriad forms of mazeway re-syntheses in order to cure Europe's alleged societal and spiritual crisis, or use the failure of such projects as a muse to diagnose advanced decadence in European culture and society. In this sense, such works were conceived and realised in a spirit broadly cognate with the intellectuals studied by this thesis. Further, as with the case studies explored by this study, each of the European thinkers and artists adumbrated above created cultural production that was rooted in two central factors: first, a generalised sense of modernity as decadent; and second, a conception of the war as a partial *rite de passage*, grinding down mentalities into a liminal state so they were prepared for a new world to emerge, but failing to actually offer this new world. Of course, readings of this crisis in Britain and across Europe were informed by a host of variables, such as national histories

and temperaments, political allegiances, religious sensibilities, philosophical schools, and so on.

By recognise these two pan-European trends – i.e. viewing modernity as decadence alongside the cultural production surrounding the First World War responding to a partial cultural *rite de passage* to a new world – seemingly diverse trends among the European intelligentsia of this period appear to hold more significance that merely forming a jumble of disparate phenomena, lacking any common aspects. By adopting a model of maximal modernism employed by this study, alongside these cultural anthropological conclusions which help us understand the particular impact of the war on European thinking one can more clearly understand how and why the ideas of figures such as Orage, Penty, Wells, Sinclair, Rosenberg, and so forth, chimed with wider continental trends, as manifest by figures such as Barbusse, D'Annunzio, Codreanu, Broch and Bloch. To reconstruct in detail the similarities between British intellectuals and their continental cousins is a goal well beyond the scope of this chapter. However, this is a task already in process of fruition within many cultural histories covering this period. Let us turn finally to a brief exploration of this emerging secondary literature, which is attempting to locate indigenous British patterns of modernist thought and action within a European context, in order to place the findings of this study within a wider context of academic debates.

Re-writing Britain's place in modernist thought

As with this study, in recent years various academic discussions have attempted to regard British cultural production in terms of parallels with, rather than contrasts to, European experiences. Therefore, we can view the model of maximal modernism deployed by this study as a part of a wider, variegated attempt to model modernism in Britain, and draw out parallels and differences within wider European culture and society. This comparative angle has yet to be fully developed by academics. In order to round off this discussion, let us finally examine some of the trends in this emerging secondary literature that is revising perspectives on British intellectual history in the first half of the twentieth century.

We can begin this survey of the literature reassessing Britain's place within international trends in cultural production with Stefan Collini's *Absent Minds.* This book attacks the reluctance to consider Britain as a nation in possession of an active intelligentsia during the twentieth century, a myth that Collini dubs the 'absence thesis'. He argues that

intelligentsias are an integral aspect of modernity, and Collini's conclusions call for the development of 'a richer historiography about intellectuals in twentieth-century Britain and elsewhere' to counter suggestions that intellectual life in Britain has been less significant and less interesting than in other countries.[14] Ironically, Collini's analysis highlights how British intellectuals themselves have often propagated this falsehood, and even located *The New Age* as a cultural product central to prompting use of the term in positive context in the early twentieth century. As this study has demonstrated, a working notion of an intelligentsia is merely a basic component of writing the histories of intellectuals, especially useful when making comparisons and contrasts with their behaviour in various European contexts. Britain clearly had its own intelligentsia, yet the history of this aspect of British cultural life has been poorly written due to a sustained attempt to deny its existence.

Despite this problem, we can see some important studies of the British intelligentsia. One excellent example, focusing on the field of eugenics, is Dan Stone's recent *Breeding Superman*. This study highlights that British radical cultural debates took this notion seriously, thereby countering assumptions that the idea was only associated with continental political modernism, especially Nazism. Indeed, we have also touched on this theme with the prewar thinking of Wells, highlighting the role of eugenics debates in Edwardian Britain. As a concept, the maximal modernist connotations of eugenics lay in the way it promoted the myth of creating a more refined human being. By fusing science and human myth making, then, eugenic thought offers a secularised and distinctly maximal modernist vision of redemption for the human race. Interestingly, one of Stone's key case studies of intellectuals who propagated eugenic thought in Britain is Oscar Levy, and Stone even asserts that *The New Age* is 'a journal that has still not received the attention it deserves for its role in promoting early modernism'.[15] Nevertheless, there remains much empirical work regarding the relationship between British intellectuals and the promotion of eugenics. Elsewhere, highlighting the elision between tropes of societal health and themes linked to maximal modernist thought, Daniel Pick's *Faces of Degeneration* identifies cultural trends in late nineteenth century European culture that presents modern society through the lens of degeneration, thereby encouraging thinkers of the era to perceive their social reality as

[14] Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.502.
[15] Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) p.10.

decadent. Pick locates this trend in emergent academic disciplines such as phrenology, psychology and criminology, alongside fictional works such as *Dracula*. Further, his analysis contrasts common trends in British, French and Italian contexts, again highlighting Britain's place within a wider European context of cultural production.

Regarding the maximal modernism of the far-right and the intellectual origins of fascism in Britain, Thomas Linehan's *British Fascism 1919 – 39* highlights that, as with the ideology's continental counterparts, the intellectual heredity of interwar fascism in Britain had roots in the crisis of the *fin-de-siècle* era alongside the crisis years of the war. As we have already seen in the discussions by academics such as David Harvey and Frank Kermode, many forms of European modernist thought had their origins in a crisis of modernity that emerged in Europe from around the eighteen nineties. Indeed, regarding the development of fascism and modernism more generally, Roger Griffin's *Modernism and Fascism* cements this perspective, demonstrating that the political modernism of fascist movements in Britain, and especially in Germany and Italy, rooted their ideologies in the alleged sense of crisis of decadent modernity, especially from the 1890s onwards. Walter Adamson's *From Modernism to Fascism* similarly highlights the Italian variant of this phenomenon.

Radical left-wing perspectives were also central to interwar political modernism, and figures such as Orage, Penty and Hobson remain under-explored in the secondary literature. However, Thomas Linehan's more recent study, *Communism in Britain, 1920-39*, helps to redress the balance here. His exploration of the British Communist Party analyses the movement from a cultural as well as political perspective, drawing out how the party comprised more than merely a political position, and rather allowed members to live out an alternate way of life. Nevertheless, the study of the more minor radical movements, such as guild socialism, in relation to cultures of modernism remains to be realised. There is scope for a major monograph on guild socialism itself, as the secondary literature on the movement is currently dated. Meanwhile, the interest in left-wing aspects of maximal modernism need not come from straightforward studies of key figures or movements. Indeed, analysing the relationship between progressive political views and modernist aesthetics, one recent study has revised assumptions of parochialism and a lack of modernism regarding British architecture in the interwar period. Countering this dated view, Elizabeth Darling's instructive book *Re-Forming Britain* helps to demolish the myth promoted by figures such as Nikolaus Pevsner that modernism in this field was alien to British minds.

Indeed, her groundbreaking work demonstrates how a fertile and indigenous modernist architectural movement developed in Britain in the interwar period. Darling demonstrates how this movement sought to promote and popularise architectural modernism in journals and magazines, ahead of achieving its goal of modernist architecture in reality. In this process of fighting a 'war of position' promoting maximal modernism in this domain, we can also turn to Penty. In the pages of *The New Age* he wrote of the need to rethink architecture in the face of capitalism's lack of spiritual awareness. In fact, Penty offers a perfect case study in the relationship between architecture and radical thought. His conversion to guild socialism was directly linked to his background in architecture, and his radial thinking often blended urban planning with readings of William Morris' nascent political modernism.

Elsewhere, a further instance of revision regarding the lack of modernist tendencies in British cultural production can be found in Meredith Martin's recent essay that regards Wilfred Owen's editorship of *The Hydra* through a modernist lens. Indeed, poetry and modernity were clearly linked into the work of all the war poets, and further comparative study of this inter-relationship would be a welcome addition to the secondary literature. Such inquiry could also map continuities and differences between British and European trends in war poetry – an aspect currently under-developed in much of the secondary literature on this topic. Other areas of twentieth century British literature have been far better served by the secondary literature on modernism; though many critics do not develop parallels with continental forms of modernism. Rather, analysis tends to focus on the Anglo-American context of literary modernism, located especially in central figures such as Eliot, Pound, Lewis and others. Countering this transatlantic focus, one fruitful result of the University of Nottingham's Modernist Magazine Project, which will focus fresh attention on continental Little Magazines from the early twentieth century, could be to help promote the synergies between British and continental forms of aesthetic modernism.

Finally, it is worth highlighting another maximal modernist figure, a radical rarely mentioned in general discussions of modernism in Britain during the First World War, Patrick Pearse. From our maximal modernist perspective, we can counter the lacuna in this regard, and contextualise his revolutionary nationalism as a form of political modernism. For a detailed exploration of Pearse's views and actions, we can turn to Seán Farrell Moran's *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption.* His study offers both a sophisticated psycho-history of this revolutionary figure, alongside a concluding chapter that specifically locates Pearse's

idiosyncratic fusion of nationalism and revolutionary religious politics within the wider revolt against positivism of the early twentieth century. Indeed, regarding the war as a positive experience, Pearse argued in 1915 that the 'last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe ... The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed by the red wine of the battlefields. Such august homage was never being offered to God as this, the homage of millions of lives gladly offered for love of country.'[16] Further, although Pearse hoped for a genuine revolution in Irish politics, he also knew beforehand that the Easter Rising itself was an affair doomed to failure. However, believing purely cultural forms of Irish nationalism such as the Celtic Twilight movement to be ineffective, Pearse conceived his own blood sacrifice as a part of a wider cultural 'war of position' that would inspire a future 'war of manoeuvre'. Therefore, the rising was intentionally conceived as a semiotic structure that symbolically attacked the hegemony of British rule, rather than an event that would in itself result in revolution. In this regard, his subsequent execution not only helped to strengthen the cause of irredentist Irish nationalism, but also installed Pearse as a political modernist martyr figure drenched in nationalist redemptive qualities for subsequent generations of Irish radical political groupings. Maximal modernism, then, could also be used to help analyse other radical Irish nationalists, offering a framework for comparison with other political radicals of the era.

More generally, there is still much work to be carried out on this topic, both in terms of original research and the contextualisation of British cultures of modernism within wider, European trends of confronting a decadent modernity. Variants of the maximal modernist model deployed by this study could help to set this research agenda. Alongside the studies discussed in the Introduction by Robert Wohl, Roland Stromberg, Modris Eksteins and Vincent Sherry, by contextualising the original research of this study within this wider body of secondary studies analysing British cultural production, it is possible to place the findings of this thesis within more general trends in the academic literature concerned with British and European culture during the early twentieth century. Indeed, in the light of this study, the stress to be taken from this indicative example of a diverse body of secondary literature examining how British cultural experiences manifested forms of radical thought and

[16] Patrick Pearse in Seán Farrell Moran, *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption: The Mind of the Easter Rising, 1916* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, c1994) p.152.

behaviour, is to question further how maximal modernism found various forms of expression in twentieth century European culture and society, especially in Britain.

The exploration of the relationships between the cultural, social and political thought of British intellectuals such as D. H. Lawrence, George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Ford Madox Ford, David Jones, Wyndham Lewis, A. R, Orage, A. J. Penty, Cyril Connolly, May Sinclair, Virginia Woolf, and Oswald Mosley, and their continental counterparts is still an academic trend in its infancy. Pace the Modernist Magazine Project, which is largely restricted to aesthetic modernism, there remains a great deal of primary source research still to be completed on the key intellectual journals that have allowed various forms of commentary and debate to be developed by the British intelligentsia. Indeed, a secondary literature dedicated to examining the cultural production manifest in many currently under-researched, British Little Magazines and journals such as *The New Age*, *Arts and Letters*, *The New English Weekly*, *The Blackshirt*, *Left Review*, *Tomorrow*, *Fact* and *Horizon* would provide a new angle from which to comprehend how ideas cognate with continental concerns found unique expression in Britain. This research needs to take into account political ideologies, speculative philosophies, religious commentaries and discussions of the social implications of the sciences, alongside the arts, in order to develop a more complete picture of the British intelligentsia. As has been made clear by the examination of *The New Age* by this study, such multi-dimensional research will reveal many unexpected nuances, and highlight themes and debates that warrant comparison with other European countries.

Conclusions

This final discussion has firstly compared the case studies analysed by the thesis, drawing out the similarities and differences in their views. By highlighted the diversity of intellectual roots manifest in the case studies examined by this thesis, this chapter has also drawn out the multi-dimensional comparative framework that is offered by the maximal modernist model. Following this discussion, it has been able to augment the maximal modernist paradigm with a way of conceiving radical change drawn from cultural anthropology. This addition to the cluster of concepts comprising the maximal modernist paradigm has helped to reveal a historically-based casual link between the wartime concerns with diagnoses of modernity as decadence and the war itself. Such diagnoses were either framed alongside countervailing hopeful visions of renewal, or by views that regarded a decadent modernity as a longer

period of liminality and elemental transition. Further, a brief, indicative survey of continental thinkers responding to this postwar mood demonstrated its prevalence in left-wing and right-wing figures, as well and intellectuals from western, central and eastern Europe. Finally, it has offered some suggestions on future research topics, building on a growing secondary literature that is becoming more receptive to viewing British trends in various forms of modernism within a comparative, European understanding of such terminology. This has highlighted especially the need to conceptualise a British intelligentsia and for greater empirical research on the publications in which British intellectuals have talked both to each other and to the wider public.

This final chapter, then, has highlighted how the model of maximal modernism is both highly flexible and can be used in the future in examining empirically the relationship between British cultural producers and the Europe-wide sense of crisis that was generated by refined sensitivity to the crisis of modernity. Further, it has attempted to demonstrate the importance of regarding British experiences in comity with cross-continental desires to re-root one's existence within a new sense of spiritual and societal order during the First World War, alongside the profound sense of failure in this quest by the war's end. To finish with a quote symptomatic of these wider finding, T. E. Lawrence emphasised this point in his ironically titled *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph.* This book catalogues Lawrence's experiences, and the way he acted out the role of what this study would describe as a form of maximal modernism. Specifically, it presents Lawrence's attempt to root an emergent Arab nationalism through the creation of a new nation-state in the tenor of youthful rebellion; as a battle against the wisdom of superior officers and conservative aspects of British society every bit as much as one directed against the Ottoman forces. Here, Lawrence phrases the sense of hope that the war created, and the inability to ground this hope in a new reality, in a way that could apply to many intellectuals' responses to the outcomes of the First World War:

> The morning freshness of the world-to-be intoxicated us ... We lived many lives in those whiling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth could win, but had not learned to

keep: and was pitiably weak against age. We stammered that we had worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us and made their peace.[17]

[17] T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p.23.

Conclusions

To bring this study to a close, let us briefly recap the main achievement of using the maximal modernism ideal type to study the British intelligentsia. The most important finding is that, aside from instances of modernism in aesthetics, with the maximal modernism paradigm we can detect radical engagements with a decadent modernity in a number of other fields of cultural production in First World War Britain. It is these highly variegated intellectual products, spanning neo-Marxist ideology to poetry, that have been identified as instances of maximal modernism by the thesis. Therefore, the term modernism has been greatly expanded beyond its usual limits of describing aesthetic cultural artefacts, and has been refocused to allow for the analysis of a wide range of discourses. However, we have not used it to examine all cultural engagements with modernity, only those that diagnosed decadence and offered a radical response to this identification. By viewing disparate ideologies and perspectives, from guild socialism to May Sinclair's idealism, and from Wells' revision of religion to Sassoon's wartime satirical poems, as highly diffuse forms of maximal modernism, we have been able to see that the British intelligentsia during this period was characterised by an assortment of views that diagnosed a crisis of modernity, radically opposed mainstream bourgeois life, and sometimes even promoted fundamental cultural change.

Therefore, through this model, the study has identified an underlying tenor, present across a wide range of cultural production, that emphasised how the war represented a 'sense of an ending' for one world, while the future would either comprise an optimistic new beginning, or a pessimistic, inescapable state of liminality for Europe. We have also seen the remarkable diversity of cultural production in which this tenor found expression. Therefore, this general finding should be tempered by emphasising that clear intellectual distinctions existed between these case studies. The conclusions of this study do not argue that, despite some superficial differences, the thinkers and artists surveyed were essentially developing the same message. Clearly, there were crucial differences in the views and ideas that have been examined. Indeed, detailed empirical exploration of the nuances and details of such ideas has also been offered by this thesis. In particular, the study has sought to highlight where the maximal modernist paradigm has reached its heuristic limits, e.g. in the case of Brooke, also

demonstrating that these case studies have not been simplistically developed in order to fit the model.

To underscore the diversity of thought contained within the maximal modernist paradigm, let us briefly review the multi-dimensional way in which the model has been used to analyse the case studies. In the first chapter we saw how Orage synthesised into his version of guild socialism a number of counter-hegemonic intellectual trends, including Marxism, Nietscheanism and the legacy of William Morris' version of medieval Britain. By creating a detailed textual recovery of his publicism during the war, we have seen how this philosophical backdrop enabled Orage to develop a multifaceted reading of the conflagration, one that often returned to his core idea of economic revolution as a solution to the antinomies of capitalist modernity. Then, in the second chapter, this textual recovery of key debates from *The New Age* was able to draw out the diversity of guild socialist thinking published in the journal throughout the war. Other guild socialists, such as Hobson, Brown, and Penty, offered competing variants of the ideology, demonstrating the diversity of thought and emphasis within the movement. For example, Brown's focus was primarily a cultural critique of capitalism, whereas Hobson offered detailed notes on the economic impact of the war and its relevance to the projected guild socialist revolution. Meanwhile, following the Russian Revolution Penty discussed how guild socialism was in direct competition with Bolshevism. Aside from guild socialism, *The New Age* offered a number of other maximal modernists the opportunity to publish their work. Therefore, in the third chapter we saw how a wide range of views were expressed by a highly diffuse set of thinkers. Oscar Lævy demonstrated the Nietzschean strand within *The New Age*, which was also represented by other contributors, such as Janko Lavrin. Elsewhere, contributors ranging from Ananda Coomaraswamy to Herbert Read, and from R. A. Vran-Gavran to Ramiro de Maeztu revealed the array of intellectual viewpoints expressed by maximal modernists in *The New Age*. Indeed, what we can see from these exceedingly diverse intellectuals is the way that the maximal modernism ideal type allows broad comparisons to be made among very different types of intellectuals. What is being dubbed maximal modernism, then, was not a single, coherent position, but rather a radical sense of conceiving the world with the common denominator of regarding mainstream, bourgeois viewpoints as signs of cultural decadence.

Moving on from *The New Age*, when examining the thinking of H. G. Wells through the lens of maximal modernism, the study was able to make sense of his religious thought, developed in direct response to the war. As we saw, not only did this build on a prewar critique of western modernity, but it also directly fed into wartime fictional writing. Therefore, we began to see how the model also allows for comparison between fictional and non-fictional writings. Previously, studies of Wells have tended to ignore the synergy between his wartime political and religious writings and his fiction, in part because he himself disowned these religious speculations after the war. However, to sideline this issue is to neglect an important aspect of Wells' work. Therefore, viewing these writings through the lens of maximal modernism has helped to bring back to the secondary literature a more complete picture of Wells' calls for a political religion to emerge as a solution to the wartime crisis of modernity. Another writer whose wartime non-fictional work can be seen reflected in her wartime fiction is May Sinclair. Therefore, as with Wells, the maximal modernist model has allowed comparison between her non-fictional writing (comprising biography, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and journalism) and her fiction. By examining all of these documents through a single methodological lens, we have seen how Sinclair formulated a reading of the early twentieth century as an era in need of spiritual revitalisation, and how the war was creating a new arena for heroic behaviour. In her philosophy and her fiction, Sinclair celebrated these chances for heroic regeneration, and asserted that the confrontation with death offered to soldiers a higher level of spiritual consciousness. Wells and Sinclair, then, were not only dissimilar from each other in many regards, but both writers were also distinct from the regular contributors to *The New Age*. Though both their works manifested maximal modernist qualities, these writings were also invested with the authors' own issues and concerns. For example, Wells was interested in radical left-wing politics, whereas Sinclair was more concerned with feminism. These concerns were reflected in the pages of their wartime writings, and so maximal modernism alone does not allow us to develop a fully rounded understanding of these texts.

Finally, by looking at three war poets, we explored the outer limits of the maximal modernism ideal type. Rosenberg's complex poetic representation of the war often chimed in part with the themes of maximal modernism. They also expressed other issues provoked by the war, such as the sense of man's regression to a more primitive state when in the trenches, as well as the unanswerable existential questions raised by sustained exposure to

death on the front line. These poems can only be partially understood in a comparative context, and so detailed study of their inner meaning is also crucial to understanding Rosenberg's unique reading of his wartime predicament. Meanwhile, Sassoon can be identified with the model, but again only in part. His radical satirical poems railing against a corrupt establishment, his encounters with a novel sense of personal spirituality, and his sense of a profound disconnect between prewar and wartime experiences, all chime with maximal modernism. However, his quick regression to bourgeois conformity after the war demonstrates how this radicalism was only sustained by the war itself. Following the war, he did not develop further maximal modernist qualities, despite a brief interest in radical left-wing politics. Finally, Brooke's attitude to the modern world clearly identified within it decadent qualities, and in his university days he began to develop a radical set of views, which Virginia Woolf dubbed Neo-Paganism. In the end, he quickly outgrew this attitude and by the outbreak of the war Brooke had become far more socially conservative in his viewpoints. Therefore, even though his poetic response to the war evoked youthful revolt more than patriotism, ultimately Brooke's confrontation with a decadent modernity lacked an authentically radical dimension, and so his poems do not offer us an example of maximal modernism. Rather they are a clear case of kitsch wartime cultural production, an aesthetic form of lying.

Tying these multi-dimensional findings together and placing them in a wider contextual setting, the final discussion added a further dimension to the maximal modernism model: cultural anthropology. Building on the work of Victor Turner, Anthony Wallace and the cultural history of Eric J. Leed, the final chapter suggested a causal link between the First World War and the growth of a widespread, highly diffuse, liminal mentality among European intellectuals. By seeing the outbreak of the conflict as the opening up of diverse forms of cultural disaggregation, the war and its aftermath could be viewed as a crisis representative of the need for European society to achieve forms of cultural and social reaggregation. The discussion gave some signposts marking out areas of interwar cultural trends across the continent where maximal modernism could be detected, thereby offering examples of this phenomenon among intellectuals and other radicals of the era. These ranged from the fanaticism of revolutionary communists to the various fascist ideologies that developed far-right visions of an alternate modernity for Europe, including figures operating in eastern Europe. The interwar trend in maximal modernism should also be seen to include

radical philosophers of the period, ranging from Ernst Bloch to Martin Heidegger, and important writers and artists, such as Henri Barbusse and Robert Musil. However, artists and intellectuals who did not develop radical critiques of modernity at this time should not be included in this wider contextualisation. Finally, to generalise, maximal modernism highlights how such works could either manifest examples of programmatic forms of radical regeneration, or alternately voices that lamented the lack of regeneration while diagnosing the continued sense of European decadence. Clearly, this excludes from the category many responses to modernity that lacked such a critical voice, demonstrating the distinction between modernity and maximal modernism. However, as with this study, such sweeping generalisations should not be seen as final conclusions, but rather as tentative points of departure when interpreting and understating the idiographic nuances of interwar intellectual history.

To return this concluding discussion to Jay Winter's assertion that the war did not create a culturally constructed sense of rupture within historical time, clearly these conclusions suggest otherwise, emphasising that the war was subjectively regarded in terms of apocalypse and even possible renewal by many intellectuals. Indeed, it was an event that engendered a liminal mentality, and for some also offered the potential for a national, or even Europe-wide, mazeway re-synthesis. Although not a theory that can be naïvely applied to every discussion of the war's cultural significance, the 'modernist thesis', or rather what this study dubs the maximal modernist paradigm, remains an important aspect when analysing the history of the First World War. *Pace* Winter's assertion of the need to transcend such a perspective, nuanced variants of this outlook have a continued relevance for scholars studying the war. This is because many intellectual figures across Europe came to regard the conflagration through an ultimately mythic lens of the disaggregation from structured society, while some even hoped for reaggregation into a new world. They did so because, by perceiving the war as both the epitome of modernity's decadence and even represented the birth pangs of Europe's renewal, they could envisage a profound solution, in the form of social redemption, for a world they believed had become materially and spiritually decadent.

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